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Ananda Varta

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Ānanda Vārtā

A quarterly journal dealing mainly with the divine life and teaching of MATA ANANDAMAYEE and with other religio-philosophical topics

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ĀNANDA VĀRTĀ

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Ānanda Vārtā

VOL. XXII] JANUARY, 1975 [NO. 1

The One who is the Eternal, the Atman,
He Himself is the pilgrim on the path of Immortality,
He is all in all, He alone is.

Mātri Vāni

What God does—everything whatsoever—is for the best. Just as a physician cuts an abscess and removes the putrid matter, thereby freeing the patient from disease, even so by giving you sorrow God cleanses and purifies you and then takes you into His arms. God delivers man from all sins and blemishes, saying: "Offer all your impurity and depravity to me and in return receive the ambrosia of Immortality." He makes the devotee suffer pain and trouble in order to increase his eagerness, his yearning for the

Real. God accepts as a worship the agony, the flood of tears of the distressed.

* * *

Just as a plant in a flower-pot is firmly embedded in earth, no matter how much the pot may be moved from place to place—exactly in a similar way keep God steadily enthroned in your heart. Unless you reach a certain elevated state of consciousness, you cannot at all times sit still in one posture. Yet, although you may change your place, God ever remains enthroned in your heart.

* * *

What you have to do, do it well and with your might. By persisting you will gradually develop interest in it and come to love it.

* * *

On the journey through life it is natural that everyone should be subjected to heart-rending pain. Everything proceeds by the dispensation of Providence. Taking recourse to endurance and patience try to do your duty with calm and steadiness, with a God-centred attitude of mind (*sat-parivesh*). Unless he takes the path to the Supreme, man cannot find peace. Therefore the remembrance of God must be sustained under all conditions and circumstances.

* * *

In this world, is there any expedient for man save to be anchored in fortitude and forbearance !

Consoling himself out of his own resources let him remain unperturbed. Everyone must try to fulfil his own duty in a spirit of dedication to God (*sat-anuṣṭān*). A human being should live in the contemplation of the Eternal.

* * *

For the *sādhaka* and the *sādhika* it is imperative to be constantly absorbed in the thought of the Supreme. No other thoughts of any kind are to be tolerated. The more time one devotes to meditation on the Highest the fewer worldly considerations will arise. For those who have dedicated themselves to this path unreservedly with heart and soul, even some negligence in the duty to their parents will not result in any obstacle or setback to their *sādhana*. If one's firm and undivided attention is given to the Supreme Path, God himself takes care of everything.

* * *

Without attaining to inner yoga one can certainly not become an instructor of yoga. When one who is in living touch with Him who is called the Supreme Lord of Yoga (*Yogeshwara*) teaches a yogic kriya, points out the path of yoga, no physical harm will come to the disciple by practising it. There is then hope that the path that will bring him in touch with the yogic current (*yogic dhāra*) may open out for him.

From the Life of Mataji

Bithika Mukerji

(Continued from the April 1974 issue)

(Mataji's visit to Gujrat, Oct. 18–Dec. 9, 1937.)

The beginning of the idea of establishing educational institutions under the aegis of Mataji's *kheyāla* can be traced back to about this time. Before Mataji left Almora, Hari Ram Joshi and a few others broached the subject in Her presence. Mataji's words with regard to these projects were: "If you wish to undertake a work of this order, you are certainly free to go ahead with it. I have nothing to say in this matter. As you know I have no *kheyāla* for undertakings of this kind. Jyotish also had some thoughts regarding the establishment of an exemplary school where the teaching of the fundamentals of the tradition would be combined with instruction in all modern subjects. What I say is that any good work which is undertaken with a sense of commitment and service is worthwhile. I say this because all of you have a great desire to do this work of benevolence and merit. All good and selfless enterprises all over the world are services to the One God. All of you are as a rule engaged in work for your own selves, so it is desirable that you should become involved in altruistic work also. One must however, remember that unflagging endeavour is to be directed towards the realization of Truth. Any service to humanity or good work which may be conducive and helpful towards this end should be undertaken. Similarly anything which is a distraction must be rejected. The enterprises which help toward God-realization are alone worthwhile. All work must be undertaken with a view to increasing and expanding the sphere of God-remembrance."

Hari Ram Joshi with the help of a few devoted friends of Bhaiji subsequently laid the foundation of an institution for boys situated in Almora in the Ashram which developed gradually into a big establishment from the simple beginnings of Bhaiji's *samādhi.*

Mataji stayed in Dehra Dun for less than two months. During that time the local people came into closer contact with Her and began to understand something of Her unique personality. They saw that Mataji was untouched by Bhaiji's demise although Her great concern and thoughtfulness on his behalf could not have been called into question at any time. The comparative strangers who were rendering service to Her at Dehra Dun gained in confidence in daily contacts with Her. It could be seen by them clearly that although Mataji took delight in all places and as heterogeneous a group of people as could be contrived by anyone, she retained her own way of doing things, which was extra-ordinary, or rather unique to Her only.

Mataji, at the invitation of Manmatha Nath Chatterji and others, attended the annual Durga Puja of the Bengali community of Dehra Dun, on Oct. 13, 1937.

After the Puja, She said to Her companions, "Now that we have come to the City, let us not return to our place but go on to Hardwar".

As usual in Mataji's presence, improbable things were accomplished with comparative ease. Mataji's retinue, quite considerable at all times, enthusiastically accepted the plan and travelled to Hardwar the same day with Her. At Hardwar She visited the Ashram of Mangal Giri Maharaj and also went to see Swami Ashimanandaji. She stayed in Hardwar for three days only. On Oct. 16, She reminded Swami Ashimananda that he had once offered to escort Her to the holy sites near the river Narmada in Gujrat. He expressed his readiness and eagerness to travel to Gujrat with Her any time. Mataji immediately said : "Let us start to-day, by the first available train."

Thus, proceeding via Delhi, Mataji, accompanied by a comparatively smaller party, came to Chandod, a small town on the river Narmada on Oct. 18, 1937. Swami Ashimananda was quite well known in this part of the country. He had made arrangement for their stay at the Vishnudas Temple.

The visitors found the local people very hospitable and courteous. The temple catered to people of all denominations and welcomed all travellers who were desirous of visiting the holy places near the shores of the Narmada.

Mataji's party included Sri Naresh Chakravarty, a professor from Calcutta and Shachi Babu, both very quiet and serious minded men. Didi, Swami Akhandananda and Bholanath were with Her at this time and also Mataji's father and mother.

On the way to Chandod, Mataji remarking on the grave demeanour of Shachi Babu, said, "You seem to have become quite a *gambhirnath-babaji*".[2] Mataji's use of the word "gambhirnath" awakened memories in Shachi Babu's mind. He recalled with some surprise and a great deal of excitement that long ago he had read an account of Gambhirnath Babaji, an ascetic of good renown. Gambhirnathji had practised austerities on the shores of the Narmada and had experienced many remarkable events. After reading this book Shachi Baba had a longing to visit these places but in the press of a busy life had quite forgotten about this. He now suddenly realized that his wish was going to be fulfilled in a manner quite beyond his expectations.

The banks of the holy Narmada have long been favoured sites for *tapasyā* (the practice of intense *sādhana*). The entire region is sprinkled with temples, shrines, ashramas and also less frequented huts and caves where one may spend years in absolute solitude. In one of those caves, Sri Balananda Brahmachariji of Deoghar had spent several years.

Mataji visited the Ashram of the Guru of Sri Balananda Brahmachariji and was made welcome by the present incumbent Sri Kailashanandaji. Mataji visited other places of interest, travelling by boat after sunset. This seemed to be the usual mode of procedure because the sun made the open boats very uncomfortable during the day. The local people could not speak Hindi and nobody in Mataji's party (excepting Ashimanandaji) knew any Gujrati. Conversations therefore were limited. This however did not prevent Mataji from exercising her ineffable attraction on men, women and children. Slowly but steadily the number of visitors increased day by day. Mataji went to Ahmedabad and Baroda for a few days, then returned to Vyas and Karnali on the Narmada in the first week of November. She became known to people from all strata of society: business magnates in Ahmedabad, men and women belonging to such professions as law, medicine and teaching, along with the simple people living in the river-side villages. The towns-people could talk with Her a little in Hindi and She spent as much time with all those who came to seek Her advice as She always did wherever She might be.

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[2] The word *gambhir* means serious or profound, In other words Mataji said, "Why are you looking so serious ?"

One educated young lady asked Mataji, "Is there a need for Guru in one's life ?"

Mataji replied, "Consider the fact that all one's life one is subject to the influences of people around one. To begin with the parents, then teachers, in fact there is no end to the number of people from whom we require to learn something or other. So a teacher is always necessary, a teacher who will direct one's effort in the right direction. You may look at it from another angle too. Supposing you want to undo a recalcitrant knot. You have to bring it under focus, and with patience and dexterity, unravel the chords. Similarly, in order to achieve freedom, one must bind oneself down, or in other words accept discipline."

Another young girl asked, "Mataji, I cannot meditate on any form of God. As a matter of fact I do not care for any symbol whatsoever. How can I get control over my mind ?" Mataji said, "In that case, you may just sit still and concentrate on the natural process of breathing. If you train yourself to do that, that itself will act as a symbol for you."

The questioner professed herself very satisfied with this answer.

One gentleman asked Mataji one day, "Is transmigration of souls a fact or not. ?"

Mataji : "Yes, but only for those who have such a *samskāra*, those who are not determined by their belief in this matter, are not reincarnated in other bodies."

The gentleman then said, "In this case it would perhaps be better to be born as a Christian or Muslim, who do not believe in reincarnation and for them all is over in just one life time !"

Mataji smiled and said, "I did not mean the predilections engendered by one's religion. *Sāmskāra* may cut across religious faith. It all depends upon the status achieved by the individual soul. What is thought to be true is that all souls are not necessarily reincarnated."

One day Mataji out of Her own *kheyāla* explained at some length the Vrindavan-lila of Sri Krishna. She said, "The *mādhurya-bhāva* is self-authenticating. Unless the mind has attained a level of being in rapport with the Divine, one cannot hope to understand the līla of Krishna. In the state of union or samādhi, the senses are transcended and then only one may experience the bliss which is sublime. Some people, unable to grasp the nature of this spiritual experience, try to impose upon it their own understanding of such matters and thus reduce it to their own level. This is why we hear so often people voicing their reservations regarding the līla of Krishna. The fact of the matter is that unless one transcends totally the mundane sphere one cannot step on to the divine ground of Vrindavan."

Naresh Babu, the professor from Calcutta, found himself very much at home with this type of discourse. One day he said with some satisfaction, "It is my conviction that the *achintyābhedābhedavāda* of Shri Chaitanya has touched the ultimate heights of human yearning for God. Whatever one may say, the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara leaves one with a feeling of dissatisfaction because the heart plays a very small role in it."

Mataji did not agree with this opinion and said rather forcefully : "Only those who do not have a proper understanding of these matters hold such opinions."

Naresh Babu was very pleased to think that he had elicited from Mataji Her definitive sympathy with the Advaita position of Vedanta but then he had to reconcile this with Mataji's positive and constructive renderings of all theistic positions also. He said a little ruefully, "I see that I am only beginning to get a glimmering of the scope and range of Mataji's understanding."

Ma said with a smile, "Do you know what *māyā* is? "***mai āyā***" (मैं आया*), that is, "I am". Māyā is coterminous with the experience "I am." If there is no "I" there is no Māyā."

Mataji, as always and with unflagging interest and deep understanding, listened to all those who related to Her their innermost thoughts about their spiritual life, their attainments and disappointments. Mataji in general does not discourage anyone from his chosen path. If a person has embarked on a wrong and ruinous course then She gently guides him away from it. To one such person She said, "It is most difficult to circumscribe one's own wilfulness. It is very easy to mistake one's own will for Divine intervention or inspiration. One must always examine carefully all that comes as motivation. Divine inspiration is self-evident and will transform one's life. The most exalted of personal motivation must not be identified with Divine will. One must however always keep oneself open or in readiness for receiving Divine inspiration."

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* In Hindi मैं आया sounds a little like māy*ā* and means 'I have come'.

During this visit to Gujrat the foundations for future contacts were laid. Mataji moved amongst the people as if She had known them for a long time. She was at home in all these new places and the local people came to look upon Her as the personification of their most cherished object of worship. Their total acceptance of Her was matched by Mataji's attitude of complete familiarity with Her surroundings.

Mataji, accompanied by Her party, left Gujrat at the beginning of December and, travelling across the north of India, She came to Tarapeeth on December 9, 1937.

(To be continued)

Thoughts on Mataji

II

Jyotipriya (Lynn Dalton)

(Continued from the October issue)

Excerpts from my diary: November 8th, 1972.

At last, this very morning, I have met my own Mother. My thoughts are jumbled and my ego working overtime. I wish I could appreciate Her more. But I came these 12,000 miles for Her, for my salvation; now that I have seen Her I can die in peace; my heart is satisfied because She is the living God. I knew I had to come and see Her if only for one instant and then my life would be in Her hands; I felt I would die if I could not see Her......truly that must be Her very own Grace.

We hope to see Her again today for evening darshan. We set out for the Kankhal ashram at 4.00 P. M. I had my first ride in a bicycle rickshaw ! What a ride ! I was hanging on for all I was worth ! It will take me a while to look graceful riding in one of those.

At the ashram, there was some lovely kirtan led by Pushpa, and a holy man spoke for some time. Mother appeared on the balcony but didn't come down. Many of us were resigned to leaving when we saw Her reappear on the balcony; we could see that She was giving privates up there. After a while, our Swami Nirmalananda spoke to a Hindu Swami who arranged for us to go upstairs. Because we are foreigners it is almost always harder to be in Mother's physical presence, often long delays.

Getting upstairs to see Her was surely worth the wait. The temple bells were ringing as we approached Her. She seemed to be swaying slightly to their music; no, She seemed one with their timeless sound. It is a moment I can never forget, the most incredibly magical, intense moment of my life. The emanation from Her is almost blinding; it is so utterly pure. I am looking at a Goddess.

For the first time I consciously experince Her peace and bliss; this is beyond words. No photograph, no films, no amount of talk, has prepared me for the impact of Her presence. She is the embodiment of graciousness. She smiled with such great sweetness as each of us went up to Her and pranāmed, looking down at each of us with such compassion, raising her folded hands in pranāma each time. She seemed to be saying, "Hello my children, at last you are here, I knew you would come."

When I went up to Her and did praṇāma, I offered an orange; Mother made a motion to one of the girls nearby, who gave me a banana. I hastily stuck this into my bag. Later I saw that I had two other bananas in there, and not knowing which one was the prasād, I had to eat all three !

She arose from Her seat after we all had pranāmed. None of us could move. She came into the center of our group and seemed to go directly to Satya and make a motion with Her arm, as though to say, "Well, here I am, do as you will." Perhaps She was motioning for us to move aside, because we were standing in front of the door to Her room without realizing it. But Satya fell to his knees, and leaning against him for support, I did too, and then did the rest of the group, forming a circle around Her. There was an intense silence all around. When we rose She paused at Her doorway and graciously gave us a final greeting.

Again and again, no words can describe Her perfection. I "knew" before I came that She is God incarnate....that alone is quite an admission; it took many years before I learned that such a being could and does exist and walk this wretched earth. But She is so much more than one could ever expect or hope for. To see a being like that is to be blessed beyond belief.

She emanates such youth, even though She never rests and we hear She has been ill. Her every motion is so graceful and natural, so completely at ease. Her very presence fulfills every desire and brings tears of joy. Ma is real ! I had to find this out.

She is utterly still and blissful; She is Bliss Itself. Jai Ma !

Before we went to the railway station to meet Her this morning I had a dream. I dreamt She was in samādhi; we were trying to carry Her to a comfortable spot. The whole group of westerners were there, but I didn't see their faces. Some Indians were standing around, apparently they weren't devotees of Mataji. We finally got Her onto a bed. Her eyes were closed but She was looking at me from behind the lids. They were the eyes of Narayana, they held me with their look of love and terrified me at the same time. I knelt beside the bed and just felt so happy to at last be in Her presence.

I was tempted to touch Her feet but She seemed to withdraw Herself from anything physical. Touching Her seems so gross, as if it would defile Her. Is She ill because we who touch Her are so full of filth ? Yet you cannot help but adore and worship Her. She has a human form and this can deceive you; but She is so much more than human. In the dream Her eyes were saying, "I claim you. You belong to me." There was not a trace of pity or sentimentality in those eyes; only the purest love. That is what scared me.

There is much I like and love about India itself aside from Mother. The pace is slower than in the West; many things are done as they have been for centuries. Some people may think that is not good, but it gives this land a charm and timelessness that is unequalled anywhere. The people are so often poor, yet they have wonderful smiles, especially the children. Perhaps because the doctrine of reincarnation is so much a part of their lives, they bear their lot philosophically...perhaps too fatalistically at times. There is little emphasis put upon the material and they seem to accept all in such a childlike manner. One feels sorry for them, and yet envious at the same time, at the simplicity of their lives In the West, so much importance is based upon the material that we are being gobbled up in it and that consciousness is smothering. Even out in the country it cannot be escaped.

Hardwar seems like a dream. Cars, horns honking, temple bells, shouts, laughter, chanting, the Ganges rolling by, the sweet sunshine on my balcony, holy men walking below my window—can this really be happening to me ?

How can I really be here; I am afraid to pinch myself; yet......was I ever not here? The whole panorama takes place within a breathless silence; all is birthed from the great body of Ma.

November 9th. "We saw Ma again at the ashram this morning at about 10:30. I was feeling so low; my chest hurts and cough wracks my whole body. Head completely clogged. But seeing Her was marvellous! I got right up close to Her and just soaked it in. Such waves emanate from Her!

We are all having our ego problems. I think these conflicts become more pronounced when we are near Her, because She is forcing us to face ourselves. How little we really love God! It is so easy to talk and become a spiritual egotist. But Mother is Kali, killer of falsehood. She is not easy to take. I laughed hilariously today when I overheard Swami Nirmalananda talking to some of our group, saying,......"if we could see Her true form, it would kill us......it would be like sunlight on germs."

November 11th. Somehow I have managed to miss two nights now, when Mataji gave privates to members of our group. I left the ashram early both times, thinking that there would be no chance of getting in to see Her. Being with Ma is a waiting game. I am learning that if one is persistent, there is always a chance of seeing Her. We all crave Her personal attention; we have questions, or we want objects and gifts to be blessed. Mataji is teaching me, revealing much. She is Truth; in Her presence one cannot lie; it makes me squirm. I may have been unconsciously afraid to be with Her alone. But now I am to see Her for sure tomorrow.

November 12th. I finally got some private time with Mataji today; it was extremely brief and rushed, and not really private. There are always so many people crowding around Her. But I have no need to engage Mataji in long personal discussions. I just came to verify my mantra, and to get a few things blessed by Her hand. This was done in short order; Mataji gave a very special, loving blessing to some beads. Her manner was almost playful. As I came up to Her, She seemed so natural that I almost forgot to do pranāma; as though sensing this, She said in English, "Sit down"......like, "Don't bother with all these formalities, we both know why you are here and what you are going to say." I felt like glass under Her gaze, utterly transparent; yet, it was not an uncomfortable feeling. I felt completely accepted. But I also felt a little silly; do I really have to bother Mataji with this nonsense ? I had pictures of a couple of people for Her to look at and bless, and a loving message from Haripiya involving a problem she was having with her spiritual endeavours. Haripriya later told me that as soon as she received Ma's reply which I sent that evening, the problem vanished. When I told Ma, "Haripriya says she loves Mother", Mataji folded Her hands so sweetly. I wished I could have sincerely told Her, "I love you"......but She strips one of all facade and I could not tell Her without being phoney or dramatic. I only want things from Her......can I truly give Her my unconditional love ?

November 15th. Samyam Saptah has begun. This is my first experience of such a function, and I am pretty much in a fog. My health is still very poor and this is a discouragement from attending all day. But once you leave, it is hard to know if your āsana will still be there when you return. Although we are not supposed to touch anyone, the Hindu ladies crowd in and press against us; sometimes I have to really use my elbows to push them away. At this point it is hard for me to appreciate the Samyam, as I understand so little of what is going on. But I have formed a pattern of attending the 8 to 9 A. M. and 3 to 4 P. M. meditations, because I know for certain that Mataji will be there. Silent meditation in Her holy presence is something I would not want to miss.

November 18th. I have really just begun to enjoy and appreciate Samyam. As I walked in the grounds today before the afternoon meditation, with a lovely kirtan lilting in the air (over the loudspeakers), I suddenly felt as though I were walking a little above the ground, floating. All at once I seemed to see just where I was and realized the great fortune of being here. I feel as though transported to some glowing astral heaven. I felt a kinship with all the souls that are attending. Most of all, it seemed today like some magical world which is only found in fondest dreams. Mother is magical, fulfilling all desires beyond our wildest hopes. But it can only really be that way when we have surrendered to Her......only then can we really know that She alone is the doer; only when attuned to Her does anything really happen. The rest is our mess.

All through the Saṃyam week we have been told that no one is to follow Mother back to Her private apartments.

But each day I have noticed that more and more people do follow Her back there. Today I told myself I had a good excuse, because Kripa and Bhakti, two girls on the trip with us, are leaving immediately after Samyam, and have made an appointment to say good-bye to Mother and receive Her blessing.

I followed them back there to watch from a respectable distance, and to snap some pictures if possible, which I did. Many others were standing around, some waiting for privates, some just watching. As the girls were talking to Mataji, Chitra suddenly emerged from the building and thrust a pair of Mother's slippers (which I had asked for earlier) into my arms. My chest burned when I held them and tears of joy sprung to my eyes. They seemed the most precious of jewels to me. Even the little bit of cow-dung stuck to the sole of one slipper is holy to me.

Today may have been the greatest of days, perhaps as great as the very day I first met Mataji in the flesh. After Kripa and Bhakti left, I stayed around to look at Her while others came and went for their privates. When everyone had gone, with just a few of us standing around, one of the girls came with a container full of nuts. Mataji dipped into this and started handing out large handfuls of prasāda. I went up and had Her put mine into a blanket I had with me, later regretting that I didn't use my bare hands so as to feel Her skin against mine. But I felt impure and hadn't wanted Her to touch me.

Then everyone had their prasāda and no one else came up for an interview; Mataji sat there for a moment, as though waiting for someone else to come up to Her. I stood leaning against a large pillar just in front of Her. I knew I should take the opportunity to bow at Her feet and show my love and gratitude, and receive Her infinite blessing. Mother suddenly looked somehow small and frail, almost a little vulnerable, alone somehow; as if, now that everyone had received what they wanted from Her, no one cared. Isn't it true that we treat God that way ? He is always there when we want His love, but are we always there when He wants ours ?

Something made me freeze and I could not move from the pillar, but could only stand and stare at Mataji. I wanted to bow to Her, but I guess I was afraid; my ego either could not bend, or I was afraid of rejection. Then Mother gave me THE LOOK. It was the look I came to India for. It was the look that told me that Mother knew me personally, my entire past and future, everything about me. It was such a powerful look that I blinked several times, as though a flash bulb had gone off in my face. Mataji seemed to wait another moment, as though to say, "Do you want to say anything to me ?" but I still held back. Then She said something to the girls and got up and went into Her apartments.

I left then, feeling as light as air. Mother had looked at me in a way I had never dreamed possible, yet had always yearned for. I know beyond doubt now that She is the Sadguru. I went and sat by the banks of the holy Ganga, herself a celestial being, the river truly is Mother .. sitting near the Siva temple, listening to the bells and kirtans, with the mantra humming effortlessly all the while.

I was too intoxicated to move. I do not know how long I sat there, but when I became aware it was almost dark. I got up and went back to the Tourist Bungalow.

At this point, I wonder how much of the intoxication is Her, and how much is puffed-up pride. I sense that leaving Her physical presence will be a hard withdrawal; I anticipate this.

(To be continued)

"One can regard this eightfold universe as a manifestation of God; and whatever worship is performed to it is excellent as worship of God. The repetition aloud of His name is better than praise. Better still is faint murmur. But the best is repetion with the mind. Better than such broken meditation is its steady and continuous flow like the flow of oil or a perenial stream."

—Shri Raman Maharshi

Holy Reminiscences

Jainath Kaul, M. Sc.

(Continued from the last issue)

2. My Second Darshan of Ma

After my first darshan of Ma in November 1955, I never thought of Her again, as in the light of my own clear experience described in the first article, Ma was a celestial being to whom a seeker like me with so many imperfections did not deserve any access. The Divine Mother, the '*patita pāvani*' (purifier of the fallen) had, however, decided otherwise. Seeing the miserable plight of Her child who was failing repeatedly in his struggles against his weaknesses, the *Kripamayi's karuna* (compassion) had been aroused, bringing me into the region of Her *kheyāla* and so I could not remain outside the circle of Her devotees, all of whom, as we understand, are chosen by Her.

Ma's Significant Visit to Delhi

How this happened throws also an interesting light on Her super-dynamic '*līlā*' (divine play). Mother is always on the move and everyone of Her incessant movements is full of significance. One of these brought Her one day to Delhi, some twenty-eight months after I had had Her first darshan.

Now, apparently unconnected with Her visit, a small worldly *līlā* was going on in our family circle. My father's youngest brother and his wife had come to Delhi with their youngest son who had just passed the I.A.S. examination. A talk had been initiated for his engagement with a girl whose father I learnt later was an old and well-known devotee of Mataji and we were all booked for dinner at his place on Saturday, the 8th of March, 1958, the day on which Ma came to Delhi. So we went to his house that night and while we were chatting there, he announced casually that Ma Anandamayi had come to town that day and that he and his wife would like to take us all for Her darshan to Sri Anandamayi Ashram in Kalkaji the next morning.

I go for Ma's Second Darshan

Naturally, when I heard the name of Mataji, I was completely taken aback. Apart from the fact that the girl's father suddenly went up in my estimation as some sort of an angel because he seemed to be so familiar with Mataji, and his family a blessed family which enjoyed the protection of a sage of that order, the prospect of a second divine darshan brought back a vivid recollection of my past experience. While considering myself as not deserving of the rare privilege, I still welcomed the opportunity as God-sent and began looking forward to the moments I would be spending in Her blessed Presence.

When we arrived at the Ashram the next morning, Ma was giving darshan in the central hall. As the girl's father had requested permission to do Ma's puja in Her own room, we were escorted there and before long found Ma in our midst. As soon as She entered the room, my subconscious mind recalled the soul-stirring experience of my first darshan at Kali Bari in Nov., 1955 and I was over-come with such an emotional upheaval within me that I could neither look straight into Ma's face nor register any details of what was happening in the room during Her presence there. I lost my composure completely and all I was able to roughly recollect later was that the girl's mother had done the puja and Ma had said "*Hari katha hi katha aur sab vritha vyatha*" (Real talk is only about God; all else is useless and painful.)

The Divine Compassion

As far as I remember, Ma did not say or do anything else at that time and left the room after a few minutes when the puja was over. Afterwards, when we had all come out of Ma's room, I found to my dumb-founded amazement, my uncle addressing me with the words, "Ma was looking at you all the time; it did not seem to make any difference whether the rest of us were in the room or not."

This remark and comment shook me to my roots. I could not have imagined even in a dream that a Divine Being could possibly take interest in such a small person as myself. For the first time that day I realized that Ma was not only the topmost living sage in India and a superhuman being but also an embodiment of *karuṇā* (compassion). The thought that She had taken so much notice of me was so overwhelming in its effect that I had to retire at once to a secluded corner outside the Ashram compound and allow the torrent of tears of gratitude and joy at my good fortune to flow unhampered till I felt relieved of the unbearable emotional tension.

A Parallel from the Life of Christ

For long I could not understand why Mother had shown this interest in my case. Then, years later, I came across the following passage in the Bible, Matthew 9 (10-13).

"10, And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples.

"11. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners ?

"12. But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, *They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*

"13. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice : for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

So this is what the Incarnations do. And I got a fully satisfactory answer to my earnest query, "Why had Ma taken notice of me ?" Because I needed help. I was sick and helpless and very unhappy with my repeated failures in the fight against my imperfections and Her mission was to heal the sick.

To conclude : my first darshan of Ma had ended in my firm conviction that She was a celestial dweller of the high Heavens with whom a crawling insect like myself could have no relationship. But after my second darshan that day, which I felt completely sure She had Herself arranged by coming to Delhi for just one day, and that particular day—She left on the night of March 9th*—an invisible but unbreakable link was firmly established between this child and his divine Mother. From then onwards, I who had not thought of Ma for over two years after the first darshan, began thinking of Her frequently with love and a feeling of personal relationship, collecting Her pictures, reading avidly about Her and attending with joy and enthusiasm almost every function whenever and wherever it was held in Her presence.

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* See Ananda Vārtā, Vol VI, No. 1, p. 72.

Some Utterances of Swami Ramdas

(Collected by M. M. V.)

Question : What is the quickest way to attain the goal?

Swami Ramdas : There are two ways. One is to expand your ego to infinity, and the other is to reduce it to nothing; the former by knowledge, and the other by devotion. The *Jñāni* says, "I am God—the Universal Truth." The devotee says, "I am nothing, O God, you are everything." In both cases the ego-sense disappears. The safer and surer way is to take refuge in God and be ever under His grace and protection.

Question : Is God personal or impersonal?

Swami Ramdas : God is at once personal and impersonal. You can behold Him as everything and in everything in the universe. At the same time you maintain a close relationship with Him in His personal aspect. He becomes your constant companion.

Questton : What is the most important thing on the God-ward path?

Swami Ramdas : Ramdas shall tell you about the path that leads the soul to God. The first thing necessary is grace. It is grace that makes us long for God. Longing for God develops into a constant remembrance of Him and the constant remembrance of Him gives us the vision of Him, the experience of Him. This experience brings us the whole-hearted love for Him—our Beloved—everywhere, inside and out.

This is the final stage wherein the soul reaches the goal and finds complete peace, bliss and freedom.

Grace—Grace is pouring on all of us alike. Some people open the windows of their hearts to receive grace; while some others keep them closed and they don't get it.

Satsang and Satnāma—Company of saints and God's name constitute sādhana.

Question : Can daily work be integrated with spiritual life ?

Swami Ramdas : Provided the work is done selflessly and in a spirit of dedication to God.

Go to God as a Child

Our dependence on God must be absolute. It is not that we must purify ourselves first and then go to Him. He must purify us. We must go to Him like a child. A child goes in a dirty condition to the mother. The mother does not reject it, or ask it to come clean. She takes the child, washes and dresses it with clean clothes. God is more loving than an earthly mother.

The Joy of Japa

Japa must be done with intense love and devotion for the object of your worship, that is, God. The japa becomes spontaneous and gives you bubbling joy in your heart as you go on doing it.

You should not do it as a discipline imposed upon you by somebody else...When you have love for God, japa must give you great joy. Therefore mystics say that repetition of God's name gives them ecstasy, a sweetness and joy which is indescribable. This shows that it is not mere mechanical repetition that helps us, but a spontaneous outflow of our love towards God along with the repetition of His name.

Surrender

Many people do not know what surrender actually means. Verbal surrender will not do. Surrender must be of every part of your being—a total, integral, complete surrender. Your heart, mind, senses, body—all sbould be offered up to the Divine. Then you are guided by Him from within and you act as He wills. You are happy whatever the circumstances in which you are placed, ... when you surrender yourself to God, your ego will die and the desires will disappear. When the tree is cut down, the birds on the tree fly away.

Guru

The meaning of the word "Guru" is "dispeller of darkness" or "giver of light." Guru is the embodiment of God on earth to liberate souls from darkness and bring them light. Guru is an awakener and a saviour.

Sri Krishna as Peacemaker

Professor Tripurari Chakravarti

The central theme of the great Indian epic *Mahābhārata*, is the tragedy of a total and terrible war of annihilation waged in ancient times for the throne of Hastinapura, the grand old capital of India. This war was between the unrighteous Kauravas on the one hand, and the righteous Pandavas, aided by Śri Kṛṣṇa, on the other. The *Mahābhārata*, as the poem itself tells us, arose out of the following question, which Janamejaya addressed to the venerable sage Kṛṣṇa Dvaipayana Vyasa on the occasion of the great snake sacrifice at Takshasila :

"How did the quarrel arise among those men of unblemished deeds ? How did that great war occur which was the cause of the destruction of so many beings ?"

It seems at first sight exceedingly strange that the answer to so simple and straightforward a question should run into one hundred thousand *slokas*, or verses—a bulk which is eight times as great as that of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* put together or that of the entire *Bible*.

This is the prima facie view of the *Mahābhārāta*, the story of the great epic viewed on the mundane or material plane. But if we look deeper into the work, we realize that it would be a mistake to place all the emphasis on the material aspect. Throughout the great epic, there is an audible undertone which tells of very different matters. Among other things, it constantly speaks of the vast eternal background against which wars are lost or won, and kingdoms perish or survive. As we enter deep into the subject, we begin to perceive the underlying significance of the entire poem. We feel that there is a high ethical purpose underlying the whole theme, and we become aware of a new and important perspective on the ethical or moral plane.

This realization is the result of the fact that the war on the mundane plane has been deepened into a cosmic war between the *devas* and the *asuras.* The scene is one of constant opposition between good and evil, between justice and injustice, between *dharma* and *adharma.* The conflict, essentially, is that which is referred to in the sixteenth chapter of the *Bhāgavad-Gitā*, and which is the opposition between the *daivi sampat* (divine estate) and *asuri sampat* (demoniac estate). Viewed from this standpoint, the story of the Bharata war comes to have universal significance and universal validity. The perpetually recurrent situations of life, with which the *Mahābhārata* deals, are, in fact, as real and as true today as they were over five thousand years ago. Like a true epic, the *Mahābhārata* takes us into a region in which nothing happens which is not deeply significant. The entire epic rotates round the fixed axis of *dharma*, justness and rectitude in human conduct. On this plane, the epic seems to impress upon the reader or the listener the paramountcy of enduring moral values. A careful study of the book makes us feel that the *Mahābhārata* war has, in reality, never ended. It seems to us as if it is going on even now at the present moment, and that it will go on thus for ages. The *Mahābhārata* war thus becomes the type or the archetype of all wars or conflicts, past, present and future.

The pivotal figure in the epic is Śri Kṛṣṇa (*mulam Kṛṣṇah*). That is the great pronouncement of the writer of the *Mahābhārata*. Sri Kṛṣṇa is *persona sine qua non*, without whom nothing can happen in the great drama. In the drama itself, he moves as a human politician *par excellence*, keeping his superhuman personality somewhat in the background. The great Bharata war, in which he plays the most important or decisive role, ends in almost total annihilation of the combatants on both sides. Of the eighteen *akshauhinis* of armies which met and fought on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, there survived, we are told, only ten souls—the five Pandavas with Sri Kṛṣṇa and Satyaki on one side, and on the other, only three warriors. Kṛpācāryā, Asvatthama, and Kṛtavarma—a terrible lesson which humanity must learn afresh at the end of every great war.

At the conclusion of the war, Sanjaya reported to Dhrtarastra :

'Only women survive, the earth is desolate, forsaken, forlorn.' The picture thus painted is undoubtedly a dismal picture—one of utter desolation.

Śri Kṛṣṇa. however, had no regrets for what had happened. Throughout his life, as depicted in the pages of the *Mahābhārata*, he was engaged in the fulfilment of a high and exalted mission. This was the establishment of a *dharma rājya*, a kingdom of justice and righteousness on the basis of the political unification of India. Early in life, he undertook the important task of removing or liquidating all impediments that stood in his way in the political field.

Kansa of Mathura, Jarasandha of Magadha, aad Sishupala, the king of the Chedi country, were eliminated one by one. He conquered the Gandharas in the north-west, the Kalingas and the Kingdom of Pragjyotisa (Assam) in the east, the Vidarbha and the Pandya kingdoms in the south. Thus the reconstitution of India, politically unified, seemed to be within the bounds of possibility. After the killing of Jarasandha, Kṛṣṇa liberated more than one hundred princes of eastern India from the prison of the Magadha King. Before the assembled princes he delivered an important speech in which he pointedly referred to the necessity of establishing *Dharma Rājya* in India, and asked for their united and unstinted support.

Yudhistira was Kṛṣṇa's instrument in the establishment and consolidation of this proposed empire, and he asked for the support of the Indian princes in the fulfilment of this *Yajña* or holy mission. The successful performance of the *Rājasuya Yajña* at Indraprastha was an attempt to erect a strong central royal power in the country. But the *Yajña* had its critics and enemies. Duryodhana, the haughty and arrogant Kuru prince, advised by Karna and Sakuni, contemplated measures of revenge. The Pandavas were invited to a game of dice at Hastinapur and, losing, were deprived of their kingdom and all their earthly belongings. They had to go to the forest, exiled for thirteen years. Kṛṣṇa, who was not present at the game of dice, thus saw his life's work being undone by the forces of evil. He visited the Pandavas on at least three occasions during the thirteen years, and gave them a solemn assurance of his support in the future contest with the Kauravas.

After thirteen years, a conference met at *Upaplavya* in the Matsya kingdom, with which the Pandavas were now united by a marriage alliance. Various viewpoints regarding the future course of action were naturally put forward in this assembly. Baladeva, Sri Kṛṣṇa's elder brother, was for the outlawing of war. He was in favour of peace at any price. He said : 'Let Yudhistir approach Duryodhana, fall prostrate before him and ask for terms.' This advice for an abject surrender did not commend itself to Śri Kṛṣṇa, who said : 'Yudhistir, who is the embodiment of Dharma, does not want to renounce everything by unconditional surrender, as recommended by Baladeva.'

An envoy was sent from Upaplavya to the Kuru Court at Hastinapur The old king, Dhritarashtra sent back the envoy, saying that Sanjaya on behalf of the Kauravas would go to Upaplavya immediately and state their terms. Sanjaya went, but in the meeting at Upaplavya he eloquently urged the necessity of putting a ban on war. He advised the Pandavas to give up everything and retire to the kingdom of the Andhakas and the Brishris, in western India. Strangely enough, Sanjaya recommended that the Pandavas should live on alms, and not go to war under any circumstances.

This advice for pacifism was not, however, endorsed by the Upaplavya assembly. But Yudhistir, as the leader of the Pandavas, put forward alternative modest and reasonable proposals for avoiding war as an instrument of policy. He asked for five villages, as an irreducible minimum, for the five brothers instead of their legitimate share of half of the entire Kingdom.

Kṛṣña had, in the meantime, joined the Pandava party after handing over his soldiers and war munitions to Duryodhana. He made it a condition precedent to his participation in the impending confict that he would not wield any weapon in the war, but would act only as the charioteer of Arjuna. His emphasis was on: "I shall be alone with you by renouncing all arms." The support that was thus assured was moral support and not a military assistance. It was to be the support of a wise, gifted, and enlightened person.

The whole of India was now divided into two armed camps. Duryodhana of course, had the predominance in armed might. He had eleven *akshauhinis* of soldiers, and the majority of the Indian princes gathered under his banner. The Pandavas had only seven *akshauhinis*, but they had the advice and guidance of Sri Kṛṣṇa, which was of inestimable value. A great and significant drama was going to be unfolded on the battle-field of Kurukshetra, different nationalities from every corner of India congregating for a mighty clash of arms. The conflict seemed to be between Śri Kṛṣṇa, standing for justice and *dharma*, on one side, and a great array of warriors representing evil on the other. The issue was, as it has been put pregnantly by the author of the *Mahābhārata* :

"Where there is Kṛṣṇa, there is *dharma*; where there is *dharma*, there is victory."

The *Mahābhārata* is called the great history of victory. This victory is not merely a victory on the mundane plane; it is victory on the ethical and moral plane also.

A little before the commencement of the Kurukshetra war, Kṛṣṇa proposed that he should go personally to the Kuru court on an errand of peace.

"I shall try to accomplish this difficult task by going to the Kuru court and I shall strive for peace without sacrificing your interests."

But he had his misgivings. He said that war seemed to be inevitable and all signs pointed in that direction :

"I am apprehending war in every respect. But still I must face the Kuru assembly at Hastinapur in order to put our case before the entire world."

A most surprising and extraordinary development in the situation occurred when, without previous notice, Bhima in the Upaplavya conference suddenly proposed an abject and unconditional surrender to Duryodhana. . Bhima was now in favour of peace at any price. He said :

'We shall all fall prostrate before Duryodhana and try to re-establish brotherly relations among us all. Let Duryodhana be pacified. I know this is the opinion of Arjuna also, because he is a very kind-hearted person.'

Bhima went a step further and tried to fortify his arguments by referring to the view of Yudhistira.

'I am not alone in saying this,' he said. 'This has the approval of the king Yudhistira.'

This somersault of Bhima was unprecedented and inexplicable. It is difficult to say how far he was right in quoting the opinions of the king and Arjuna; for the speeches that were made subsequently by Yudhistira and Arjuna do not seem to bear out Bhima's contention. Both Yudhistira and Arjuna depended entirely on Kṛṣṇa's wisdom in this crisis. A thorough and careful study of all the speeches that were made by Kṛṣṇa in the Upaplavya conference unmistakably shows that the peace that he truly sought was not a peace in negation or in some mechanical adjustment of life, liberty, and property. There was no evidence of any change of heart on the part of Duryodhana who proclaimed again and again that he would not part with even an inch of territory without war.

Therefore Kṛṣṇa was in favour of the total mobilization of men and munitions for the impending conflict. He sternly rebuked Bhima for his nervousness verging on cowardice, and exhorted him to strengthen his weak hands and feeble knees. He said that his malady caused Bhima to advocate a weak-kneed policy.

The atmosphere of gloom and depression over Upaplavya was, however, strikingly enlivened by the speeches of Sahadeva and Draupadi. Sahadeva raised a voice for open and uncompromising war, and Draupadi went a step further, saying that there could be no question of peace, compromise, and compassion under the existing circumstances. She demanded *danda*, or even *Mahādanda* punishment, or even the extreme penalty for the crimes of the Kauravas.

Draupadi was constantly afflicted by the recollection of the personal wrongs and insults she had suffered when Dushshasana in the open Kuru Court got hold of her dishevelled hair and tried to denude her.

Draupadi demanded that Dushshasana's hands be cut off and flung in the dust.

She openly declared that Bhima and Arjuna were fainthearted and lacking in courage. If they persisted in advocating a policy of dishonourable peace, then her old father Drupada and her five sons under the leadership of Abhimanyu would wage relentless war against the Kauravas. Her emotional excitement was intense and the tears rolling down her cheeks made her garments wet.

Draupadi's obvious mental agony and sorrow had a decisive effect on the mind of Sri Kṛṣṇa who at once replied, trying to console Draupadi, "Draupadi, eventually you will see the women of the Kuru family shedding tears like you."

"I give you this pledge, this solemn undertaking, that there will be total extinction of the fortunes and the lives of the Kauravas. The mountain Himalaya may be dislodged, the earth may be torn asunder, even the heavens with the stars may fall, but my promise shall not remain unfulfilled. I say all this in solemn earnestness. Let your fears be allayed. You will see the enemy prostrate and the Pandavas installed in power and splendour."

Next morning, in the month of Kartick at the end of the autumnal season, Sri Kṛṣṇa started from Upaplavya towards Hastinapur on his fateful mission. Reaching Hastinapur, he visited the house of Vidura where Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas, was staying. It was necessary for Kṛṣṇa to receive Kunti's instructions regarding his mission. Kunti, just like a Kshatriya mother and a Queen, gave her exhortation against the policy of compromise. She could under no circumstances forget the insults and ignominy heaped upon her sons and even more upon her daughter-in-law, Draupadi. Kṛṣṇa in his turn gave his assurance to

Kunti that he would always bear her words in mind in his negotiations at the Kuru Court.

At the house of Vidura, there was an important discussion between Vidura and Kṛṣṇa regarding the possibilities of peace. Vidura doubted the wisdom of Kṛṣṇa in coming to Hastinapur with peace proposals, because Vidura had no faith in the good intentions or sincerity of Duryodhana. Kṛṣṇa replied at once by saying that it was his sacred duty to explore all possible avenues of peace and try to save the Kauravas and the Pandavas from inevitable annihilation in war.

He enunciated an important code of conduct, and laid down an important dictum to be followed by states and individuals in moments of crisis. When neighbours quarrel and no understanding emerges out of the dispute, it is the duty of friends to intercede, even without any request from either side, and try to settle the dispute. Kṛṣṇa wanted to keep his record clean. He wanted to justify his action before the bar of public opinion. He greatly desired that no person in India should hold him responsible for the calamity that was going to take place. He, therefore, assured Vidura that he came to Hastinapur actuated by a desire to promote the real well-being of both sides. He would do his best, try his utmost for peace, so that nobody could accuse him of dereliction of duty.

The next morning, Kṛṣṇa appeared before the full Kuru assembly and, in the presence of the sages, saints, warriors, statesmen, princes and other members, he delivered his historic speech on the paramount need for peace and conciliation. The first sentence of the utterance was that he was a supplicant for peace without resorting to war for the settlement of the outstanding disputes.

Like a clever diplomat, he spoke in eulogistic terms of the sterling qualities in the character and conduct of the Kuru family.

He now implored Dhritarashtra again and again to control the conduct and activities of his sons with Duryodhana at their head. Kṛṣṇa gave a solemn undertaking that he would be responsible for the conduct of the Pāndavas.

He pointed out that war would lead to a great disaster.

His appeal to Dhritarashtra was also based on humanistic considerations; he was apprehensive of an Armageddon, ending in the total annihilation of all human beings.

The Pāndavas, he said, were also his own children; they became orphans at a very early age and were brought up with care by Dhritarashtra. Kṛṣṇa eloquently communicated the earnest and sincere appeal of the Pāndavas to Dhritarashtra, saying that the Pāndavas were largely looking forward to paternal behaviour from Dhritarashtra.

Kṛṣṇa's able advocacy of the cause of peace was fully supported by the great saints of India who were present at the Kuru court on that occasion. But Duryodhana was adamant; he was unrepentant. He contemptuously turned down these peace offers of Śri Kṛṣṇa, and threatened to arrest and detain him as a hostage.

Finding that the members of the Kuru assembly were silent and did not utter a single word of protest or disapproval against the proposed action of Duryodhana, Kṛṣṇa sternly rebuked them for their failure to rise to the occasion and perform their proper duties. He warned them against the danger of unquestioning obedience and enunciated the important and fundamental doctrine that an unjust act should evoke a spirit of protest from those who happened to witness it. Before the very eyes of the assembled members, gross injustice was being perpetrated. A manifest wrong was being committed by a haughty and arrogant king. The silence of the members of the assembly and the absence of the spirit af protest was nothing short of a crime. The members were guilty of criminal negligence. of duty on account of their timidity and inaction. Their silence virtually amounted to acquiescence, and the failure to protest against the injustice was a grave social wrong.

Kṛṣṇa had no hesitation in declaring that the conduct of the Kuru elders constituted a grave dereliction of duty and he predicted a great disaster. He also pointed out that it was essential, in the interests of social well-being, that a manifest wrong or injury to a good cause should not be allowed to happen before the eyes of an honest individual or in an open assembly. Indifference to or connivance at the perpetration of a wrong is tantamount to suicide on the part of those who look on and do not strive their utmost to prevent it. Kṛṣṇa had no love or respect for a 'fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed' that did not come out into the open to meet its adversary. Such virtue, he said, always resulted in decay and destruction, just as a torrential river carried away by its strong current the trees and houses on its banks.

Duryodhana's plan for the arrest and preventive detention of Kṛṣṇa miscarried. At the critical moment Duryodhana's courage failed, and Kṛṣṇa boldly marched out of the Kuru court with Vidura, Satyaki, and the saints and wise men, uttering a threat of irretrievable disaster. The supernatural or superhuman powers that he displayed on this occasion have been vividly described by the author of the *Mahābhārata*, and they will ever remain a source of perennial inspiration to the followers and admirers and worshippers of Sri Kṛṣṇa. His mind was now made up and he became sternly resolved to pursue a policy of relentless war.

Kṛṣṇa had relied on facts in arguing his case; he had made salutary recommendations; and finally he had emphasised the importance of a course of action which would be beneficial to both sides. But the self-willed and obstinate Duryodhana would not listen to any advice. War in such circumstances became inevitable.

Leaving the Kuru court in anger and disgust, Kṛṣṇa requested Karna to accompany him in his chariot up to a certain distance. This was his final attempt at peace-making. He knew that Duryodhana without the support of Karna would not have the courage to launch war. Kṛṣṇa therefore tried to win over Karna to the Pāndava side by offering him sufficiently attractive terms. He held up before Karna the prospect of the imperial crown of Bharatavarsha and the absolute and unconditional obedience of the Pāndavas to his orders. Kṛṣṇa even said that he would personally pour the sacred waters over Karna's head at the holy consecration ceremony.

This was undoubtedly an eleventh hour effort to avoid war. But Karna remained unconvinced and unmoved. Karna said that even for the mastery of the whole world and for the possession of the world's total wealth, he would not be guilty of such unworthy conduct as the desertion of his master Duryodhana and gross treachery to the Kaurava cause.

The curtain was now lifted and the stage was definitely set for the Kurukshetra war.

Kṛṣṇa had striven hard for peace, conciliation, and consent. He had been prepared to pay the utmost price for an honourable settlement. But he certainly did not want peace at any price. He did not seek peace by abject surrender or by standing before the Kauravas with a begging bowl in hand. Such an attitude would be utterly inconsistent with Kṛṣṇa's conception of *Dharma, the moral order of the universe.* Kṛṣṇa had a dynamic view of Dharma which he regarded as the power that sustained the entire universe. He was never tired of repeating 'Dharma or moral law is the greatest discovery of man, and it upholds the whole of creation.' Manners change, opinions alter, creeds rise and fall, but moral law is written on the tablets of eternity. It can no more be trifled with than gravitation. Kṛṣṇa, throughout his career, recognized the sanctity of Dharma, and he stoutly resisted any violence against the moral law. For the establishment of a moral order he was prepared to go to war—a *Dharma yuddha*. He told Arjuna on the battle-field of Kurukshetra :

'A *kshatriya* must always be prepared to wage war for upholding Dharma.'

Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* stands for this dynamic conception of Dharma. He did not believe in a peace of negation or in some haphazard, patched-up, and mechanical arrangement of life, liberty, and property. His was a mission to go forward with the banner of Dharma uplifted. The celebrated author of the *Mahābhārata*, Krishna Dwaipayana, another Krishna in the history of India, has accepted this *Dharma* as the keynote of this great book. I want to conclude by quoting the luminous message of this seer of unfathomable wisdom, whose words echo and re-echo down the corridors of time:

'Dharma should not be forsaken for the sake of any desire, gain, or profit; it should not be bartered away out of fear, nor even for the sake of protecting one's earthly existence. Dharma is eternal; pleasures and pains are but momentary. Life is real; the worldly ways and means of life are but transitory.'

"Giving up the false self is the true renunciation"

—Sri Ramana Maharshi

Mātri Satsang in Solan

Swami Bhagavatananda Giri

(Translated from Bengali
Sequel to (7) in the last issue)

June 12th, 1955.

Mataji was replying to questions about charity and hospitality which were published in the October, 1974 issue. In the course of this conversation, Mataji said : "A *kheyala* has arisen to tell you a story. Will you listen to it ?"

Everybody present most gladly entreats Mataji to let them hear the story. Mataji relates :

"There was a brahmin whose daily duty it was to have his midday meal only after feeding the Lord in the shape of a guest. So long as Narayana was not thus served he would fast and await His arrival in the guise of a visitor. Occasionally he had to wait until the evening. But somehow every day some guest or other used to turn up invariably to be served at the brahmin's house.

"Then came a time when the brahmin's death drew near. He called his eldest son and spoke to him thus : 'My son, the time has come for me to depart. But you must always carry on the service of Narayana in the shape of a guest. Do not ever fail to do so.'

"The dutiful son obeyed his father's instructions. At the arrival of the daily guest, he used to wash the latter's feet, serve food to him with great care and only thereafter would he partake of the prasāda. In this manner his service to guests continued for quite some time.

"Then, one day, a friend came and said to the young brahmin ? 'For how much longer can you daily cook food and serve your guest as a personification of Narayana ? Why dont you get married ? When you have a wife at home, all this service will become much easier for you.'

"On hearing his friend's advice, the brahmin said : 'I am willing to marry, but on one condition : If my wife ever disobeys me I shall cut off her head.'

"The friend was amused and thought : 'How can anyone cut off the head of his own wife !'

"In due course the marriage was solemnized according to these terms. The wife was under strict orders to cook daily, feed the guest and only thereafter to call her husband for his meal.

"Under these circumstances the young brahmin could spend his days very happily, being mostly engaged in either the repetition of God's name or in deep meditation of the Divine. Every day he used to eat only after his guest had been duly fed. The wife also was entirely obedient. She used to serve the guest exactly as if he were Narayana Himself.

"Then, one day, evening approached, and still there was no sign of any guest. The young woman became extremely hungry. At the same time she was afraid of committing any misdemeanour. For how could she eat without first serving food to her guest and her husband ?

"She was thus overwhelmed by dejection, when suddenly a very uncommon guest came along. He carried a thick stick over his shoulder, at the end of which was dangling a freshly severed head of a cow from which blood was still trickling down drop by drop. Never before had such a strange guest put in an appearance. The young wife started trembling with trepidation. She just could not think of what to do. If she did not attend to the guest, her husband would cut off her head, and if she did serve the guest, in what manner was she to do so ?

"Was there a solution ? She pondered for a while and then gently came forward to wash the strange guest's feet and to invite him to sit on his *āsana.* With folded hands she addressed him : 'O Lord in the guise of a guest, your food is ready; deign to be seated so as to partake of it." But the guest replied : 'First cut the cow's head into small pieces and cook it. Only then will I sit down to a meal.'

"In abject fear the brahmin girl obeyed the guest's request, cut up the cow's head, cooked it and then served it to him in a dish, saying : 'Lord, I have prepared your meal according to your instructions. Would you now be good enough to partake of it ?'

"The guest then came forward to sit on his āsana but immediately ordered the brahmin lady, 'you must first yourself eat of the cow's flesh !' At this the young woman became petrified with terror. But what could she do ? As soon as she got ready to eat in accordance with the guest's orders, he suddenly exclaimed : 'Wait a bit ! Do not eat now—first call your husband.'

"When the brahmin learnt that his guest had not yet had his meal, but was asking for his presence, he became very angry with his wife, saying: 'You must be guilty of some serious offence, otherwise why is the guest still unfed in my house?'

"Thereupon husband and wife approached the guest, only to behold that he had disappeared, but in his place they saw Sri Radha Krishna in wonderously beautiful dual form before them! Their joy knew no bounds; husband and wife felt themselves greatly blessed at the vision of their beloved *Iṣṭadeva*."

Mataji then asked: "Well, have you enjoyed the story?" Everyone called out in great joy: "What a beautiful story! We have liked it very much."

Mataji went on to say: "Serve the Lord Narayana and you will become free from sin and sorrow. When donating anything, donate it to Lord Narayana. If you bestow a gift in this spirit, you will surely benefit. Your own Iṣṭa is before you in the shape of a guest. This is the attitude of mind you must try to cultivate."

"When the object of life is attained the subject disappears."

Ramakrishna

Mātri Līlā

(September 15th, 1974–January 15th, 1975.)

Mataji reached Vrindaban on September 16th from Hardwar. A Bhagavata Saptah was held there from September 23rd (Radha Ashtami) to September 30th.

On October 2nd Mataji was back at Kankhal and remained in Hardwar for the whole of that month. Preparations for the forthcoming Durga Puja were already being carried out very vigorously, but there were few guests from outside to begin with. On October 5th, night, Mataji motored to Jaipuria Bhawan at Ramghat, Hardwar without disclosing where She was going and remained there over the weekend. However, several devotees from Dehradun arrived in Kankhal the next morning (Sunday). Sorely disappointed by Mataji's absence they went in search of Her and soon discovered where Mataji was and had Mataji's darsana there. On the 7th Mataji returned to Kankhal but for the next four or five days She spent every night at Ramghat, returning to Kankhal every morning at about 10 a.m. On October 9th, Swami Chidanandaji came from Rishikesh to see Mataji. Satsang was held in the open space in front of Didima's Mandir and he was requested to speak. But he said he had come to listen to Ma. Finally he sang some beautiful stotras to Devi as well as kirtana. Daily some visitors from other towns would turn up at Kankhal.

On October 16th Navaratri started. From that day onwards puja was performed in the structure that had been erected specially to house the deities during the festival. It was adjoining the hall in which the audience sat. For the first five days a profusely decorated earthen pitcher filled with *Ganga jal* (Ganges water) which symbolizes the goddess, was worshipped, while the images of Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati, etc. were hidden behind a curtain until the 6th day of Navaratri (October 21st), when the main pūjās began. We have last year reported at length about the Durga Pujas held at Baghat House Kharkhari, Hardwar in a magnificent style. This year the celebrations were probably even more magnificent as we were not so short of space as at Kharkhari. The very large new hall, although as yet incomplete, has now a proper cement roof and was equipped with lights, loudspeakers, etc. Thus a very large congregation could be seated very comfortably and watch the proceedings. It goes without saying that, as every year, *Shata Chandi Patha* was recited in a special room by pandits for nine days and the Devi Bhagavata as well as the Ramayana were also read and completed. There was Kumari Puja and feeding of large numbers of Kumaris daily from 21st to 25th of October. Besides more intimate functions were going on in the Siva Mandir and in Didima's Mandir. Mataji seemed to be everywhere at once and attended to everything in person.

○ Sri Gurupriya Devi had been quite ill at Vrindaban and had therefore to convalesce in Delhi, arriving at Kankhal only just in time for the main pujas. Swami Paramanandaji also had had a set-back in health during

Mataji's stay at Ranchi and was forced to take treatment at Calcutta until the last moment. It is difficult to replace these two main helpers and organisers of all activities round Mataji. However, younger people stepped into the gaps and everything was accomplished in great beauty and harmony.

The attendance was enormous. Devotees had flocked from all over the country and even from abroad and were accommodated in dharmasalas and ashrams as near as possible. Many would also come for short visits from Rishikesh and Dehradun. On *Dasami* day, October 25th, the beautiful image was taken to the Ganges for immersion after Mataji had sung exquisitely, as She usually does on that occasion. On October 28th night Lakshmi Puja was performed in the same place. On the 30th Mataji entrained for Naimisharanya where She was in retreat until November 9th.

On the 10th, She alighted in New Delhi where Kali Puja was celebrated in our Ashram on the 13th Divali night, in great and elaborate style. Early that morning Mataji had paid a visit at the house of Sri G. S. Pathak where a special room upstairs with a separate staircase is permanently reserved for Mataji's use.

Annakut was observed the next day on a gigantic scale. A great variety of dishes were offered to Sri Krishna, Padmanabh and Ma and more than 1500 people partook of the sumptuous prasāda. On both days Mataji sang for a long time very animatedly. One day Mataji accepted an invitation to a Girls' School. She also went to inaugurate some new houses which devotees had built at Kalkaji.

On November 16th morning, Mataji alighted in Dehradun. Mataji's health was far from satisfactory and She was badly in need of rest. From the railway station She came directly to Kalyanvan for a few minutes and then proceeded to the Kishenpur Ashram where She remained for one night only. The next day She shifted to Her cottage of "Panchavati" in the compound of Mr. & Mrs. M. L. Kaithan next to Kalyanvan. On the 18th midday She motored to Hardwar, where She also visited Baghat House, returning to Kishenpur on the 19th afternoon. On the 21st Mataji moved to the Ramatirtha Ashram where our 25th *Samyam Mahavrata* was observed from November 22nd to 28th.

Nestling in the midst of hills in picturesque surroundings, miles away from the town of Dehradun, yet very spacious, comprising a considerable number of big and small buildings and cottages, the Ramtirtha Ashram presented an ideal site for such a large and concentrated gathering. Acharya Sri Swami Govind Prakashji Maharaj, the head of the Ashram who had invited us, had made careful and well thought out preparations long in advance. He put the entire Ashram at the disposal of the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha. All available accommodation in the neighbourhood had also been booked. Besides quite a number of vratis stayed in "Swiss Cottages" (double-ply tents) in the compound itself. Arrangements were excellent to the minutest detail and in all respects. A beautiful pandal had been erected for the satsang in the centre of the compound. It allowed ample space for the vratis to sit very comfortably without disturbing one another. There was a remarkable hush during the hours of collective meditation; hardly any coughing or sneezing could be noticed. Mataji specially commented on this at the end. An impressive number of Mahamandaleshwaras and other dignitaries graced the occasion and daily delivered highly interesting and enlightening talks. Among them were our host, Sri Swami Govind Prakashji; Sri Swami Vidyanandaji of Kailash Ashram, Rishikesh; Sri Swami Brahmanandaji of Surat Giri Ashram, Kankhal; Sri Swami Prakashanandaji of Jagadguru Ashram, Kankhal; Sri Swami Vishnuashramji of Suktal; Sri Swami Vedantanandaji of Pavanadham, Hardwar; Sri Swami Amaramuniji of Gangeshwardham, Delhi; Sri Swami Hansaprakashji of Ramtirtha Ashram; Sri Yogiraj Nanak Chandji of Allahabad and others.

Quite a number of devotees from Dehradun availed themselves of this rare opportunity of the choicest satsang in the most enchanting surroundings. Some came regularly in their cars and others by special buses that brought them early morning and took them back late at night.

Mataji's health did not allow Her to sit in the satsang for as many hours as She used to in the past. However, She was invariably present for the collective meditation for at least one or two lectures daily, while She missed "Matri Satsang" only once: For five days She replied to questions for half an hour as the last item of the programme. After the morning session Mataji and Swami Govind Prakashji would sit on the platform by the Samādhi of Swami Hari Om Prakashji Maharaj (the former head of the Ashram) and the *vratis* could do *pranama* individually and offer garlands etc if they wished. The last night Mataji sat in the pandal for the whole evening until after the midnight meditation and sang divinely for a long time and then told stories. Although She was suffering from a severe cough and cold, this trouble was in abeyance for those few hours. Not a single cough or the slightest trace of hoarseness disturbed Her singing. Her voice was clear and powerful. That evening marked the climax of an unforgettable week.

On November 29th morning the customary *yajna* (fire sacrifice) took place in front of the pandal and then two long queues lined up for final *pranamas* and offerings of garlands, fruits, etc and Mataji distributed fruit first to those who had fasted on Gangajal for the last 48 hours (class A) and then to all the other vratis. After a feast at midday, everyone descended to Dehradun by a fleet of cars and buses and from there to their various destinations with sincere regrets that the blissful gathering had come to an end. Mataji halted at three or four houses of devotees on Her way to Kishenpur where She spent one night only. Uninterrupted kirtan was performed in the Ashram hall for several hours that evening as there was an eclipse of the moon. Mataji remained in Her room but came downstairs towards the end and then sprinkled Ganges water on everyone present. She also talked for a little while to the ashramites, in the course of which She said: "To find fault with others paves the way for a fall."

Early next morning Mataji motored to Delhi from where She boarded the train to Kanpur the same night, arriving on December 1st morning. The Jaipuria family had arranged for the recitation of the whole of the Valmiki Ramayana for nine days and for excellent, very lucid explanations in Hindi by Pandit Atul Krishna Goswami for several hours twice daily in an enormous pandal in the grounds of their residence, "Swadeshi House." Mataji attended every session for the last hour. Mataji had not brought many people with Her, but the inhabitants of Kanpur flocked in large numbers. Sri Mangthuram, Sri Sitaram Jaipuria, Sri Rajaram, as well as other members of the family, made sure that the gathering was a great success and nothing at all remained to be desired during Mataji's visit by Her or by their other guests.

On December 10th, Mataji and Her party shifted to the Ashram of Sir Padampat Singhania at Radha Krishna Mandir, where satsang is being held every year in December in a very spacious pandal. Sri Swami Akhandananda Saraswati talked every morning and afternoon for an hour each time in the pandal and in the evening replied to questions in a more intimate gathering in the Ashram hall until December 21st. Every day he spoke about *bhakti* and *shraddha* and every day he said something new. Sometimes he elucidated particular passages from the Gita or Bhagavata. He would deal with his subject from all possible angles, and what he said was intensely practical and applicable in the life of every seeker. Mataji was present at every meeting. Sometimes She gave *darśana* for a short while in a small pandal in the Ashram compound after returning from the satsang. Here also arrangements were quite perfect in every respect,

One day the saint Sri Sitaramdas Omkarnathji paid a visit to Mataji. Towards the end of Her stay Mataji went to the residences of a few devotees. As every year on the last day of Mataji's sojourn, our Delhi Kirtan party performed *Nāma Jajña* (this time a few came specially from Calcutta to join), which started on December 21st evening with *adivāsa* and went on the next day from sunrise to sunset. Mataji joined several times during the day. The kirtan was, as always, very wounderful and inspiring.

On December 23rd morning, Mataji drove to Lucknow where She halted for nearly three hours at Government House. A large crowd of devotees came for Her *darśana.* Accompanied by the Governor, Dr. M. Chenna Reddy, Mataji went to Naimisharanya by car the same afternoon. Dr. Reddy stayed on for a couple of days. Gita Jayanti was observed on the 25th.

Originally the consceration of *Purana Purusha* Mandir had been scheduled for January 14th, but shortly before Mataji left Kanpur it was decided to postpone it to May 13th, the day of *Akshay Tritiya.* However, Mataji remained at Naimisharanya until January 15th. During the daily morning-satsang, a Sikh devotee recited from Guru Granth Sahib after the reading from the Bhagavata. A *yajña kunda* was erected and the sacred fire that has been kept alive and worshipped in various Ashrams since the memorable Kali Puja in 1926, was brought to Naimisharanya and finally installed there ceremonially on January 14th. The function began already on the 10th. Dr. Reddy came again to celebrate his birthday on January 13th and was present at the festival on the 14th.

On the 15th afternoon Mataji left by car for Lucknow, where She spent an hour at the house of Sri Rameshwar Sahai and family and then boarded the train to Vrindacan.

A sacred thread ceremony was performed there on the 17th and from 18th to 25th a Bhagavata Saptah was held.

Saraswati Puja is to be celebrated in New Delhi on February 16th.

* * *

With the most profound regret we learn that Sri Swami Sharanandaji took Mahasamādhi on December 25th after a prolonged illness. Already at the recent Samyam Vrata we missed his joyful presence, while he was suffering from heart trouble at Vrindaban. For an egoless being of his stature It surely makes no difference whatever, whether he is in the body or not. But for us his departure is a very heavy loss.

Swami Sharanandaji had a deep veneration and love for Mataji. He had said of Her : "Just as the earth provides for each plant the nourishment necessary for its growth, so does Mataji guides every sādhaka according to his particular need." For the last so many years he used to grace all our big gatherings, such as Mataji's birthday celebrations and Samyam Vratas, and gladden our hearts and enlighten our minds by his discourses that came from the heart and went straight to the heart. He occupied a unique position. Having lost his eyesight in his adolescene, his talks had no background of learning. What he said was either from his own personal experience, or thought out by his own intelligence. He was the most loving and compassionate Mahātma, ever intent on mitigating the suffering of all who approached him, never sparing himself.

Though he never allowed anything to be published in his name, yet his utterances were noted down by his devotees and published without his name in a good number of volumes by the Manav Seva Sangh, Vrindaban, in Hindi and at least two books in English translation. His body is no more, but the seeds of light and love that he has sown in so many hearts and minds will grow and go on bearing fruit for evermore.

* * *

We are extremely sorry to report about the demise of Sri Raghubans Bahadur, a staunch devotee of several years standing, who passed away suddenly in New Delhi on January 2nd, 1975. Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to his bereaved family. May he rest in peace and bliss at the feet of the Lord!

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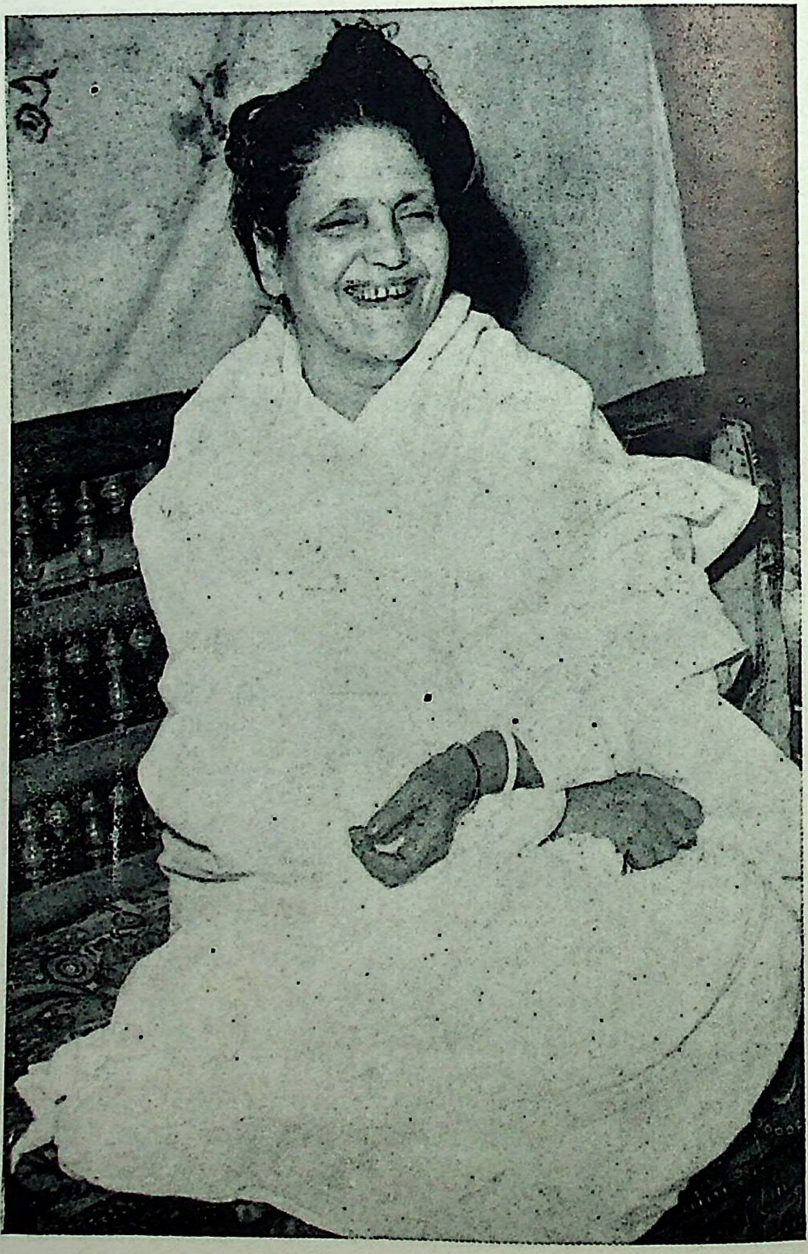

Ānanda Vārtā

Vol. XXII] APRIL, 1975 [No. 2

The One who is the Eternal, the Atman,
He Himself is the pilgrim on the path of Immortality,
He is all in all, He alone is.

Mātri Vāni

*

So long as one dwells in the realm of creation, preservation and dissolution, the remembrance of God is to be sustained under all circumstances. As far as possible submit all aspirations, petitions and prayers of your heart and mind to Him. If one has a Guru, the Guru mantra must be practised as much as lies in one's power, and if there is no Guru then any of God's names. At all times pray for the Guru's mercy.

* * *

Those who know who is their *Iṣṭa* may while doing japa, contemplate Him from His feet to the crown of His head. If one wants to engage in japa for a prolonged time, then one should concentrate on the word (*śabda*) while repeating it. God is present in the syllable (*akṣara*), God is present in the word (*śabda*).

* * *

Pilgrims on the road towards God very often encounter obstacles and stumbling-blocks which are due to their own former actions. In such cases one should pray. "Lord, gird me with patience and the power of endurance that I may be able to continue undaunted my pilgrimage on the path that leads to Thee." Keep your spirits high by reflecting that those hindrances and difficulties are breaking up your bad karma. Bear in mind that God is thus cleansing and purifying you in order to take you unto Himself.

* * *

God pervades the universe and is also beyond the universe. He is formless as well as with form. Of this very God you had a vision in the form in which you imagine Him at present. To make this clear, God took on the shape that is dearest to your heart and appeared before you. Because of your desire to find Truth this particular form manifested by God's grace. If you want to become one with God, the more intensely you engage in spiritual practices (*Bhagavat Kriyā*) the swifter will be your progress.

* * *

No matter where you may be placed, from there itself must you take to the remembrance of God. All without exception belong to Him, be convinced of this. In order to kindle the love of God one has to endeavour to keep the mind constantly engrossed in japa, meditation or the reflection on spiritual topics. Man must be gripped by a keen desire to awaken to the love of God.

* * *

Endeavour to remain ever engulfed in the contemplation of the mantra received from your Guru. He has caught hold of your hand and will never let it go anymore. At all times keep your mind at His lotus feet. You are God's own scion; if your aspiration is genuine, He will never let you turn back.

* * *

Do not even look for results—persistently remain steeped in Him. Results are not always visible. When the time is ripe the Self (*Svarūpa*) will stand revealed. You are the offspring of the Immortal—therefore be ever concentrated on the Goal which is Immortality (*Amrittatwa*).

Mātri Satsang in Solan

Swami Bhagavatananda Giri

(Continued from the last issue)

(8)

Question : I have been told that after death the soul on leaving the body immediately enters another body ?

Mataji : The question of birth and death arises solely with regard to the body—there is repeated coming and going. Birth takes place in strict accordance with one's karma. A person derives a new body to reap the consequences of whatever actions he has performed in previous births. His future progress on the path of life depends on the way he has acted before. Action, arrival, departure, position and state of existence are determined by one's previous behaviour. However, here we are speaking about position and state in this world and the next. What is beyond the various worlds is not being considered just now—bear this in mind !

Question : What is a simple way of becoming *ānandamayi* (permeated by bliss) ?

Mataji : To take refuge in God : Total surrender is absolutely imperative. Resigning yourself to Him—is this not a mode that you can assume ? That the Self is indeed *ānanda*, that your own Self is *ānandamayi* (full of supreme joy)—this you must try to understand. It is your own *ātmā*. There is only one Brahman without a second. Where does one find *Brahmānanda* (the Bliss of the Eternal) ? Whose bliss ? It is you yourself as *Brahmānanda*. The straight, simple path is to follow strictly the instructions of one's Guru.

Question : The Veda Śāstras can be said to be the Guru of us all. He whose teaching can easily be assimilated by the mind and leads to further inspiration, is surely the true Guru. The scriptures say : a few minutes of satsang can free the sādhaka from the sins committed in millions of his former births.

Mataji : How well said ! To engage in satsang is the straight, simple road.

Question : Can one attain Supreme Bliss through satsang ?

Mataji : Satsang opens the way that leads to Supreme Bliss.

Question : Only just opens the way ? Does it not accomplish the objective of bestowing Supreme Bliss ?

Mataji : (smiling) Oh well, first let the road be clear, only then can there be attainment !

Another devotee : Suppose there is an accident while walking on the road ?

Mataji : Mishaps are the result of distortion of the soundness of judgment. Where there is continuous awareness of God and satsang there can be no accident. But where worldliness has remained and God's name is also practised, where one desires God but is afraid of a ghost—there it is possible for accidents to take place. Have you understood the point ?

Question : How can this be ? This seems like keeping two swords in the same scabbard. Where the Lord resides, is there any scope for some other being ?

Mataji : When a devotee's thoughts deviate towards extraneous matters, when his feelings veer elsewhere, this constitutes an obstacle and then accidents do occur. Quite often even the attainment of supernormal powers can be a hindrance. The powers may be displayed. The mind becomes infatuated with this type of dung-heap. All this can be an impediment to one's progress towards attainment.

Question : Is the path on which supernormal powers are acquired a path at all ?

Mataji : It is a path—but not free from pitfalls. Whether the mind is concentrated or not—once you can reach a stage where unobstructed progress starts, then there is no question of further impediments.

Question : So, as long as obstacles are in the way, it seems one cannot attain the ultimate, supreme state ?

Mataji : That is so. The ultimate state is irrefutable. To have visions may mean various expressions of supernormal powers. For instance, on your way to Calcutta you get down from your carriage to get a better view of the city. Perhaps you may get ensnared there. So long as you are not single-minded you may be of two minds. In the course of your sādhana you may come across certain experiences that are full of joy. These are manifestations of the Lord's power. These manifestations can be of infinite variety. The process of your receiving them may also be infinitely varied. So long as the supreme Goal has not been attained, there is danger of obstacles, danger of a fall. A sadhaka may reach as far as the *Brahmaloka* and still return to the earth.

Question : The Sāstras say : Work with your hands and keep Sri Rama enshrined in your heart.

Mataji : Work means service. Service to whom ? To God. Where is God ? God can be found within each being. During all your life's work you must retain the spirit of service to God—in other words, the constant remembrance of Sri Rama.

Question : Our *Śāstras* say that there are thirty-three crores of deities (*devata*). Do they live on this earth or in some other world ?

Mataji : The deities reside in the abode of the deities. You yourself are indeed a *devata.* The abode of the gods is not far from you. Very near you is the realm of the *devas*, of Brahma. There is a veil that hides it—this is why you cannot see them.

Question : When we worship these deities, do they accept our *pūjā* ?

Mataji : Yes, they certainly are aware of it and respond.

Question : Some people say : Bhakti is like a dutiful spouse, therefore the impact of worldly illusion does not effect true bhaktas. But this same illusion enshrouds seekers after Knowledge (*jñānīs*).

Mataji : Well, well ! People speak of what they experience from their own viewpoint or of what they feel.

Everything is all right; but where there is unobstructed vision, the revelation of the Supreme, There, is there room for this kind of question ?

Question : There is a certain society, called "Deva Samaj". Its adherents do not believe in God but they believe in Truth and are engaged in constant service to needy individuals. Do they gain anything by this ?

Mataji : Most certainly ! In whatever manner it may be, do they not in fact take the Lord's name ?

God is Truth. Do you not say : "*Satyam jñānam Brahman.*" (Brahman is Truth and Knowledge). It is said that if someone strictly speaks the truth for twelve years, he attains to *vāk siddhi*, in other words, whatever he utters becomes true. So, even if they do not believe in God, they do believe in Truth ! If one is consecrated to Truth, this is bound to be benedictory. Steadfast adherence to Truth can accomplish everything. By speaking only the truth, the inner *śakti* is likely to emerge. God is Truth Itself, the essence of Being.

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"One seed has to be destroyed by sowing another seed, that is to say, by the constant repetition of the seed-mantra, the seed of karma will be destroyed and then no more new karma be created."

—Mata Anandamayi

Thoughts on Mataji

III

Jyotipriya (Lynn Dalton)

(Continued from the last issue)

Samyam Vrata has become the greatest event of my life; it feels like Chistmas during childhood. Everything is sparkling and magical. One evening during Matri Satsang, even though watching Mother talk, I felt distant from Her. The hall seemed stuffy, so I went outside into the lovely autumn air. Radhapriya was standing there (another American girl on our trip); we seemed to naturally gravitate to Mother's apartments. No one was around. We knelt at Mother's seat and I briefly put my head on Her cushion. The breeze blew the little coloured lights on the balcony so they seemed to make a tinkling sound. I felt enraptured and suddenly very close to Mother. There was a wooden box just there for some reason and we each took a little corner of it and sat down, saying nothing for the longest time, completely taken up in the sound of the Ganges, the vision of Krishna' blue skin (the sky and the stars), and the wonderful symmetry of the Shiva temple nearby. Time stood still and all was fulfilment. No questions, no yearnings arose; there was no doubt : God lived here.

Mother is watching all the time, but this isn't obvious to us. It is so ironic to come all the way to India to see Her, only to discover you can't handle Her Truth. She reveals how little we really love God; it is revealed in our attitudes towards Her. But we must see the false before the True can come into being. We must see what IS without personal judgment and accept it completely (whether this happens through bhakti or jñāna) before it can change; falsehood evaporates when consciously faced.

Radhapriya, her husband Krishnadas, and myself spend a lot of time together, kind of like the three musketeers. We have waited and hoped just about every evening for privates with Ma, or chances to have our things blessed. Samyam Vrata is over now, Mother is back at the Kankhal ashram; things are more hectic than when She first arrived (before Samyam), but still less hectic than while Samyam Vrata was going on. We happily feel Mother's nearness again; the courtyard has an intimacy and familiarity, and it is good just to be waiting around to catch a glimpse of Mother or to hear someone say, "Shh, Mother is resting."

It is easy to give up waiting and to go back to the bungalow thinking there is no way to see Ma; but a little patience and determination go a long way. One evening we were told we could not see Her. We sat waiting around. I watched and noticed that many, many people were going up to see Her; throwing caution to the winds, I went up the stairs. No one tried to stop me or acted like I shouldn't be there. Mother was sitting on Her platform and I waited in a line to see Her. When my turn came, I praṇāmed and She smiled very sweetly. I handed Her my japa mala, and She held it and looked at me quizzically; one of the girls nearby said, "Are you doing japa with this mala ?" I said "yes", and Mother, saying "Achchha" pressed the beads close to Her heart and then to Her forehead. I left then, but wish now I had stayed for more darshan.

Tonight is Wednesday, Nov. 22, 1972. Radhapriya, Krishnadas, and myself leave Hardwar for Delhi on Friday morning, to catch the jet from Delhi the same night. This may be one of our last chances to get close to Mataji, ask a few questions, and get our things blessed. We wait until just about everyone has had their turn, and finally we are able to go up. There is no one around but just a few of the ashram girls.

Mother has had a fever for the last few days and every time I get near Her, I feel terribly hot, as if I were the one with the fever. Don't know why this should happen. I cannot remember who interpreted for us that night; but I did get in a couple of questions and received Mataji's advice. Even though Her answers seem "standard" sometimes, they are deceptively simple; it feels very personal to me. This feeling has been borne out with the passage of time. Since seeing Ma, I have begun to learn a little about Her ways. One thing I have seen is that what Mataji says to us personally is invaluable as a form of definite instruction. We only need to put into practice......just a little......what She has said, and we will find everything changing. We will feel Her blessing almost immediately, in no uncertain terms. In fact, we have only to *remember* Her instruction not even to practise it, to feel the blessing. If the instruction seems short or somehow not personal, we are mistaken; faith in Her will remove all barriers.

Even with the fever, She was very kind and gracious. She said "Narayan" when She touched my film. There was no time to really get our things touched as we had hoped, but we were grateful for the time given us. As She got up and walked to Her room, the three of us stood looking at Her; suddenly......unexpectedly.......She turned at Her doorway, folded Her hands and said, "Narayan, Narayan, Narayan, Narayan, Narayan," tilting Her head each time, almost like in a song. I can never forget Her eyes as She looked at us at that moment. They were like coals burning into my soul; their power was so great that I was literally knocked against the wall; I fell back. We looked at each other incredulously. Then, She was gone. What can one say after looking into the eyes of God ? Having met the Shakti of the Universe and felt that power coursing through my blood, what else has life to offer ? Only more Ma, I hoped. Needless to say, the three of us coasted home as though walking on air.

Mataji teaches you that when you give up easily, you only hurt yourself and cater to the ego. Sometimes it is a lot of work trying to get near Her physical form, just as it is to contact Her from within. You can only learn this lesson by actually experiencing this "giving up"; so it is a valuable lesson. She also wears you from Her physical form by making life near Her so punishing; and by coming to you in unexpected moments, in your heart, when Her body is only a few feet, yards, or miles away ... perhaps you had just seen that body a few moments before without really feeling Her great presence. Many see Mother and many even put on a good show of devotion; but few and far between really love Her……love God, which is your very own true Self. To really love Her means to find Her within; but only She can reveal that to you. She walks this earth in that body for our sake, so that we can talk to Her, see God in the physical, and thereby know what may be possible for each one of us; yet there should be no pride in having been near Her, for this will stand between Her and us. I believe She proves this to us by sometimes appearing, in the flesh, to be human; and a moment later manifesting all Her divinity through a picture or a mental flash. We should get over this idea that Mataji has anything to do with time and distance; how can that which created you be apart from you; and who knows you better and more intimately than God ? That does not mean we can't ask Her the most mundane questions; it is just a matter of attitude; whatever our first consideration is, verily, we shall have our reward. If we want Her and love Her, She will come, and we will know She has come.

Nov. 23. Our last night here in Kankhal. Tomorrow Mother goes on to Benares, and some of our original party, including Swami Nirmalananda, Shraddha and Satya, will be following along. But for Radhapriya, Krishnadas, and myself, the trip has come to an end. I have a sense of sadness, yet I am satisfied. My desperate need to see Mataji has been fulfilled; after this, if I ever see Her again, it will be like the added "cherry on top." I will hope for it, even crave it, but not feel cheated if I don't get it.

As has been the pattern since arriving in Kankhal, Mataji has not come down for evening darshan. Since it is

Her last night here, the ashram people must have time for their privates. A lot of people are waiting around for final good-byes.

Swami Nirmalanada borrows the ashram harmonium and many of us settle into Didima's temple for a kirtan; this is a wonderful moment and I am wondering why we didn't do this every night. Mother is resting, isolated, upstairs. But after a while, word filters down that She has had Her window opened to hear the kirtan and that She has said, "Keep singing." I feel thrilled to the core, almost as if I were singing to Her all by myself. I know that She will allow us to come up if we only sing to Her long and sincerely enough, because I know that God cannot resist our love and devotion, even when we resist Hers.

After having kirtan in the temple for a while, we are all transferred out to the courtyard where mats have been laid down. Swami, leading the group, began to sing, "Oh Lord of the Universe, let me see You." As we were singing this, Chitra came to the window and from above called, "Ma says to come up now". I was taping the kirtan and to this day laugh and cry all at once when hearing the whoop of joy that went up among our group. We were beside ourselves with happiness. We even continued singing "Narayan Om" on the way up the stairs.

Inside it is cramped, with everyone wanting a little private time; but somehow I get up close to Ma, with Chitra's encouragement. Again I feel hot and flushed being near Her, as Her fever is bad tonight. Three different times Mataji looks over at Swamiji and grins, saying "Beautiful kirtan" and "wonderful kirtan"; this was a great thrill for me to see......concrete evidence of God's response to love. Later I read in an Ānanda Vārtā that Mother seems to thrive best when kirtan is going on.

Many people are getting their things blessed and asking their questions. Finally my turn comes. Then I lean my head up near Her pillow and She gives a little laugh and taps the top of my head. A tingling sensation. Now I have touched Mother's feet, and She has touched my head; life is complete.

On the way back to Her room, Chitra points in my direction as Mother walks past me, just inches away; Mother folds Her hands and says "Achcha, achchha"; and Shraddha says, "we just lost Jyotipriya again !" Everyone is laughing and happy. No one has been forgotten or left out. On the way home this mood is infectious and even the bicycle rickshaw men are chanting "Hari Om" as they peddle.

Nov. 24. Our last morning. The driver who is taking us to Delhi has arrived on time at 8:00 A. M. We drive directly to the Kankhal ashram. Chitra says Mataji was up until 2:00 A. M. giving privates. But she asks us to wait and that perhaps we shall get the chance to see Ma. We feel determined to wait all morning if need be, I give the driver some extra money for waiting. But it is only about ten minutes......or it seems......before Chitra calls.

We race up the stairs and there is Mother sitting on Her bed, just sitting up; the girls are just opening the shutters in Her room; it is dark in there and yet I seem to see Mother by Her very glow; She is radiant and looks incredibly young and childlike, and is smiling at us without a trace of self-consciousness.

We kneel at the doorway and offer our fruit, which one of the girls takes and sets next to Ma; in turn, Ma has her give us pieces of fruit. Tears spring to my eyes, not because I am leaving, but because She looks so beautiful; somehow, I do not feel I am leaving Her. I saw later that this was Her blessing to me, so that I would not feel the pangs of separation......I probably could not have stood that and the hardships of the trip too. I did not know that when I fell and injured my foot before leaving for India, that I had also grievously injured my spine, and that my physical condition was steadily regressing.

We ask Mataji for Her blessing for our return trip, which She gives, and then says, "Write us upon your safe return". This made me very happy and I have written Her several times in the two years since my return, often for advice and instruction, and just to tell Her that I love Her... I say "love" within the tiny, petty circumference of my capacity to love. Whatever love I have, only Mataji has given me.

Holy Reminiscences

Jainath Kaul, M. Sc.

(Continued from the last issue)

3. First 'Private' and a Darshan of Grace

After my second darshan of Ma on March 9th, 1958, an account of which appeared in the last issue of this journal, I began to long for opportunities to have more darshans. With this end in view, I started keeping myself well-posted with details of Ma's movements and was delighted to learn that She was again expected in New Delhi on March 20th when She would be spending the night in the new house of a devotee in Kailash Colony.* Quite a big crowd had naturally gathered there that evening and I was one of them. With me had also come a good *sādhaka*, my friend Srī Harbanslal, now Deputy Director General, Indian Standards Institution, New Delhi. This was his first darshan of Ma, and after that he began looking upon Ma as his Guru and since then has been receiving from Her guidance in his sādhana.

My First 'Private' with Ma.

It was on Friday the 21st of March 1958, the New Year's Day of Vikram Samvat 2015, when Ma had shifted to the New Delhi Ashram, that I had my first private meeting with Ma in Her room. I had gone very early to the Ashram to seek such a meeting and was blessed with an opportunity for it in the morning itself. The few points on which I had sought Ma's guidance and Her replies, as I recollect them, were as follows :

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* See Ānanda Vārtā, Vol, VI, No. 1, P, 73.

I : What is the aim of life ?

Ma : *Ātmā-lābha* (Self-realization).

I : How to go about it, Ma ?

Ma : Do you do any japa ?

I : Yes, Ma.

Ma : Then do it all the time : while sitting, walking, or doing anything, and everywhere. Secondly, look upon every happening as the will of the Lord and therefore conducive to your spiritual betterment. Thirdly, read the Rāmāyana every day and when the first reading is over, start a second reading. Do this ten times without a break.

This was in 1958 and Ma's first two directives have continued to guide me all these years through the many trials and tribulations I have had to go through in life. As for the third directive, I began reading Tulsidas Rāmāyana regularly from Sunday the 23rd of March—two days after my 'private' and completed the ten readings on April 21st, 1964.

Karunamayi's Kripa for a Devotee

When the 'private' was nearly over, Swamiji (Swami Paramanandaji Maharaj) brought Sri S. N. Aga, an old and well-known devotee of Ma, the father of the girl who was to be engaged to my cousin Jitendranath and who had also been responsible for my second darshan of Ma.* That day (March 21st, 1958) known as '*Nauroz*' (literally 'New Day') among the Kashmiri Pandit Community, is considered a most auspicious day by us and so it had been arranged that the boy's horoscope would be given to Sri Aga on that day.

Now Ma was due to leave for Dehradun the same day and Sri Aga had come to the Ashram to request Ma to grace his residence with Her Presence so that he might place the horoscope, which he would be receiving soon, at Her lotus feet. "You need not even get out of the car Ma, but please do come for a while on your way to Dehradun", he had pleaded. Swamiji pointed out that Sri Aga's residence (Pachkuin Road in Connaught Place) was not on the way from the Ashram to Dehradun, but Bhagwan cannot say 'No' to a bhakta's entreaties, and so Ma agreed to the detour and visited his place as desired by him. But Her immediate reply was a directive to Sri Aga that he should go to Calcutta during Her birthday celebrations, due to be held there some seven weeks later from May 2nd onwards, and also to bring along his would-be son-in-law to get blessings from Sri Hari Babaji and other great Mahatmas who would be assembling there on that occasion. Thereupon Sri Aga commented, while pointing towards me, that taking Jitendraji to Calcutta was in my hands. On this Ma remarked, "He is of course listening".

Ma's 'Kheyala' sends me to Calcutta

Mother's every expressed *kheyāla* (divine impulse) is a command for me, and so I interpreted Her remark to mean that I should make certain that Jitendraji went to Calcutta for the celebrations. Also, an implied intention in the *kheyāla* was, that I too should go there. Accordingly, I applied for leave for a couple of weeks and first went to Alwar. Jitendraji was still working there as a lecturer in English, as that year's I. A. S. batch had not till then been called for training. However, I failed to persuade him to go to Calcutta to comply with Ma's directive. I was naturally greatly disappointed and began to waver a bit even about my own trip to Calcutta. Just then two most unexpected developments took place which show once again that nothing can come in the way of the course of events projected by Ma's *kheyāla*.

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* See Ānanda Vārtā, Vol. XXII, No. 1, P. 23.

First of all, on my return to Delhi, I was told by my office (Indian Standards Institution, ISI), where I was working as the Chief Editor, that I had to proceed to Calcutta to take over the temporary charge of our Calcutta Branch Office, as the Officer-in-Charge, Sri S. K. Sen, the present Director General, ISI, had fallen ill. Secondly, I was inspired to write a letter to Jitendraji, and, among other points, I wrote to the effect that I failed to understand how anyone could be so unfortunate and so pitifully thoughtless as to refuse to respond to the call of Divinity Itself. And lo and behold ! this sentence worked a miracle and he decided to abide by Ma's wishes and went to Calcutta.

As for me, I had to go even some ten days or so before the celebrations began and returned only after they were over. After I had taken charge of the Branch Office, I visited the Ashram that had then been newly acquired at Agarpara and where the birthday function was due to take place. I met Swamiji there and learnt from him that Ma was staying at the residence of Sri Nirmal Chakravarty in Ballygunge where a Bhagavata Saptah was being held.*

Since he was also to go there soon, I waited for some time and then accompanied him to Ballygunge where I got the reward of a wonderful darshan of Ma in Her own room.

I Take Flowers for Ma

The next day I contacted my nephew who is a horticulturist and he arranged to let me have a few lovely sweet-smelling flowers with long stems. I was delighted and went to Ballygunge to present them to Ma and have Her darshan. It was evening time and Ma was in a park full of people attending a function. I was, therefore, unable to reach Her unaided, and being a new devotee, I did not know people who could take me to Ma.

However, after some time, I noticed that Ma had got up and was leaving the park for the multi-storeyed building across the road where She was staying. I tried to meet Her to offer the flowers, but found it impossible to cross the usual wall of emotional devotees on both sides of the route She was taking. After Ma had gone upstairs to Her room, I began loitering hither and thither terribly disappointed and frustrated, but thinking of Ma all the time. The whole place was full of people—the staircase and the entire area between the building and the park.

After a few minutes, just when I was wondering what should be my next step, I found devotees leaving the building. Those who had been crowding the staircase were seen descending hurriedly and I heard voices to the effect that Ma was coming down.

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* See Ananda Vārtā, Vol. VI, No. 2, P. 153.

While all this commotion was on and the movement of people had become uni-directional, I found myself being gently but firmly drawn in the opposite direction. So, obeying an unconscious impulse, I procceded, first, towards the bottom of the staircase and then towards its top.

Ma Gives Darshan of Grace

As I went up step by step, no one else did the same. This was certainly most remarkable. So, alone I ascended, and when I was nearing the first turn on the staircase, I noticed a tall, slim person in gerua coming down. I believe it was Swami Chaitanyanandaji whom I did not know then. Seeing me, he stepped aside, wanting me, I believe, to do the same and also perhaps said or made a sign to show that Ma was coming. Preoccupied with my thoughts of Ma, I was then unable to follow what he was saying, and as I was going up not with any deliberate will of my own, but more or less mechanically and in silent obedience to the pull of an invisible power, I could not take much notice of him. He too did not stop me, perhaps because he saw flowers in my hand.

The result of all this was that I went past him, and as I turned the corner and before I could see Ma I found a garland round my neck and Ma near me. I was flabbergasted and did not know what to do. So I just stood there speechless and transfixed, and kept on looking at Ma drenching me with an incomprehensible and indescribably sweet smile, the like of which I have not been blessed with again during the last seventeen years.

The one-pointed longing of the child to present a few flowers had found a graciously loving response in the heart of the Divine Mother, and Her infinite *karuna* (compassion) had arranged, in that impossible situation, a 'private' in the middle of a staircase with no previous appointment. Even today, the memory of the quality of that darshan, *which was GRACE in visible form*, makes me forget everything else and my mind longs for a similar darshan again.

I remember that it was not before I had stood there for perhaps half a minute or more, lost in the bewitching Divine Presence, that I thought of the flowers in my hand, and then too, was able to offer them only slowly and timidly. Ma took them and moved away, leaving me with an inexhaustible *prasāda* of a rare darshan to be treasured for ever as a divine souvenir of Her eternal GRACE.

"Try to become a pilgrim on the path to the Ultimate; then there will be no misfortunes, no anxieties, no straying into by-paths."

—Mata Anandamayi

From my Kumbh Mela Diary

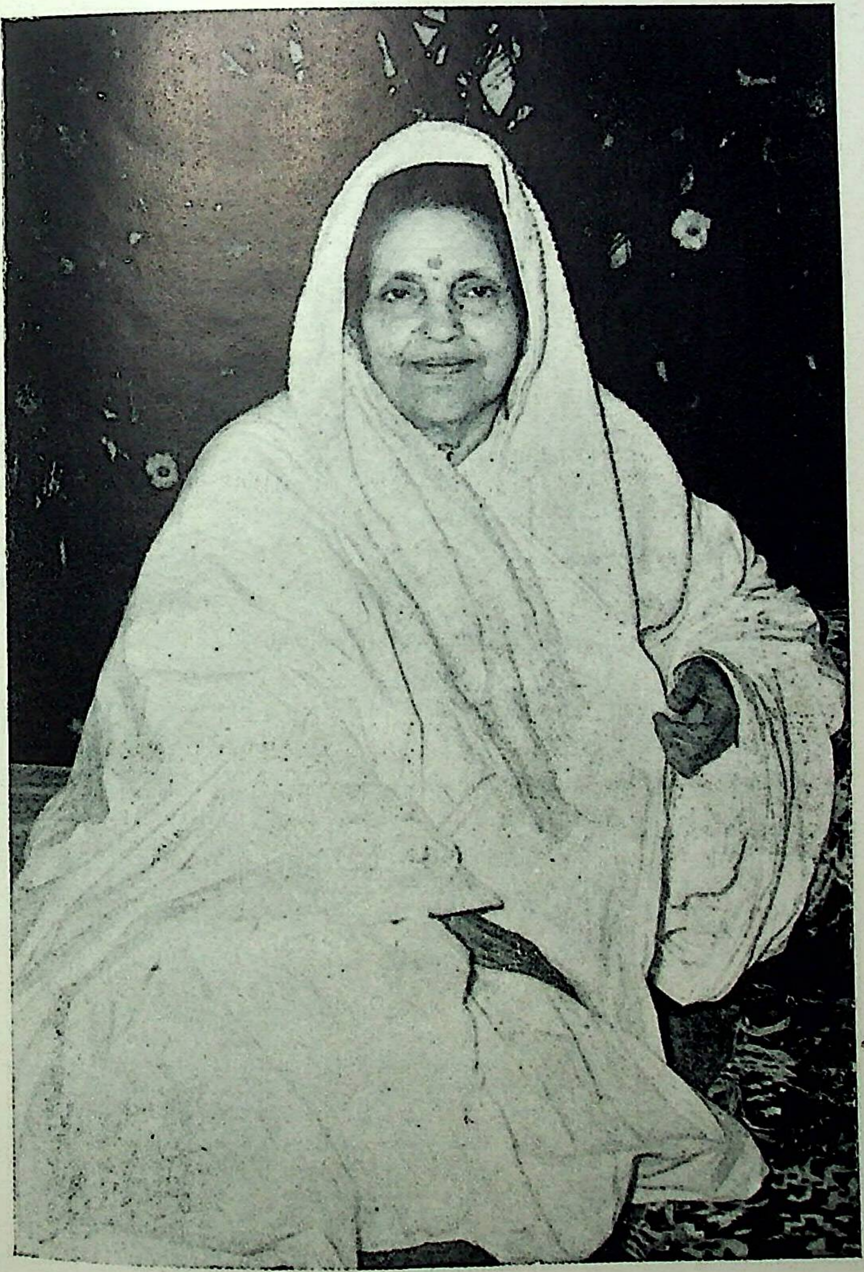
Melita Maschmann

(Translated from German by Willi Barton)

Kankhal, April 1974.

This morning, as Ma was coming from the ashram to go into the pandal, an old man prostrated himself at Her feet. He was laughing and crying at the same time. Obviously he could scarcely take it in that he—he alone among all the enormous crowds of people—had the privilege of being face to face with the famous saint. As he rose to his feet he beckoned with both arms to a group of women who had not dared to approach any nearer. They likewise prostrated themselves in the dust before Ma. Ma bowed and then said, inviting them towards the tent, "*Ao*, pitaji, *prem-darśana*"! As the people followed Her, She repeated again and again, with a pleasant smile, *Prem-darśana !*". Darshan of love, given and received by Her and the pilgrims, in an exchange of roles.

The morning satsang is peaceful and—in a relaxing way—intensive. We are in an interval between the high lights of the Kumbh-Mela. The number of pilgrims passing through the pandal is relatively small. Almost all come from the villages. Day in, day out, they go from camp to camp, hoping far a view of the famous mahatmas. Our ashram is situated right at the edge of the vast mela-complex. The elderly people are tired when they reach our tent, but



as soon as they catch sight of Ma it is as if an invigorating current passes through them. Ma calls them close to Her and speaks with them in the language of their simple lives, encouragingly and sympathetically.

Unfortunately I do not yet know enough Hindi to be able to understand the talks of the Swamis but I am happy that I can see Ma and I love to look through the tent entrance at the peepal tree on the other side of the road. Its leaves are bright green and tender. Light and shadow play in its foliage. Occasionally a shepherd drives his water-buffaloes past clumsily, leaving shadows against the green-carpeted background. A beggar plays on his flute. A bird answers from the bushes on the river bank. Then an elephant, surrounded by excited, jumping children, lumbers past. For a moment he turns his head toward the tent; his forehead bears the ritual markings of the Saktas in gleaming red and white.

Next to me in the pandal sits E., a newcomer, the wife of a Protestant pastor from Central Europe. During the morning satsang she reads her Bible. Occasionally she interrupts her reading to look at Ma, peaceful and contemplative. Two worlds ? No, one world, whose differing aspects help the seeker to find his own way. Yesterday she said, "I feel as if I've been transported back into the community of the early Christians !" Many from the West have a similar experience here : Christ becomes more alive, more actual for them when they have met Ma : ***Prem-darśana !***

Devotees from Delhi today brought a professional photographer. They apologized to Ma : "We would so much like to have some good photographs of you taken with our whole family." Ma's patience as far as cameras are concerned is boundless (some years ago it was another matter, She hardly ever allowed Herself to be photographed). She knows that photographs of Her are a priceless treasure for us. Out of sheer love She does what almost no one else can afford to do without appearing ludicrous : She "strikes a pose." In a split second Her bearing and Her face express exactly what one imagines a picture of a spiritual master ought to : cheerfulness, composure, contemplation, peace. Can this be done on command ? With Ma it can—easily, convincingly and naturally. But it is not "put on", not a facade; it comes and it is absolutely genuine. She can do what is not given to us to do : in a moment She can plumb depths from which all this, all this peace and whatever we love to see in Her, rises to the surface, strong and real, and flows into every cell of Her body. That is why these photographs have a life of their own. For the one who can feel them, they emanate vibrations which remain mysteriously linked to their source in Ma. There are people far away in other continents whose lives have been radically changed through such a photograph. For Ma, contact with the everyday world is not severed when She suddenly assumes Her "saintly" posture. The dividing line is paper-thin. When the photographer indulges in some professional acrobatic—almost flat on his stomach–in order to catch a particular shot of Ma, the expression of contemplation on Her face disappears, swept aside by infectious, hearty laughter to be replaced in a split second by the serenity of the liberated soul. The transitions are breathtakingly fast.

As a part of the festivities in honour of Didima, sadhus of associate ashrams are invited on three occasions to *bandhāras.* Ma supervises every detail of the preparations. At dawn She is on Her feet, a model housewife and hostess, for hours mobilising more than a dozen assistants into busy activity. Then by the time the guests stream into the pandal everything has been meticulously arranged. Ma sits relaxed and serene on Her couch, carefree and again quite given over to the spontaneity of the moment. The splendour and variety of the sadhus' appearance is quite fantastic. Among them are men with bold mounds of hair, with countless stiff ringlets, wild manes and also shorn skulls. Some are almost naked, some wear brilliant sashes over gay caftans. Many look more like warriors from mediaeval paintings than like monks; they bear old rusty swords or spears, the Shivaite trident, or musical instruments which cannot be seen in any of the world's museums. The swamis soberly dressed in saffron are in a minority. This lack of uniformity is rather refreshing.

While the tent is slowly filling, three young sadhus bring in the "*āsanas*" (sitting-mats) of the superiors of their ashrams and place them on the prepared places of honour. Each of them takes up his stance before the seat of his guru; each bears the insignia of the Mahamandaleshwara on his shoulder—the heavy silver staff, thick as a man's arm, its rich, artistic ornamentation betraying its great age. The aura of semi-military discipline which surrounds the deportment of these young sadhus suddenly vanishes when their lords and masters appear: three dignitaries ! The word forces itself upon me as a rare verbal revelation, as if I were seeing for the first time in my life the embodiment of its meaning in flesh and blood. But what is this "dignity" ?

The exact opposite of an assumed solemn deportment. Who here is the bearer of dignity, and who is borne by dignity? Three old men in saffron robes cross the tent with almost undignified haste to the place where Ma awaits them. When they are within a few yards of Her, Ma suddenly turns and bends down low. There is a fold in the carpet: Her guests could trip and fall! This movement of bending and straightening up again imprinted itself indelibly on my visual memory—and there is also an inner connection with the hasty tread of the Mahamandaleshwaras. The movement was not only beautiful, or graceful, but of astonishing almost childlike spontaneity, an expression of concern for the welfare of Her guests: In the lightness, elegance and harmony of this transitory movement something indescribable found expression—that eternal youth which an almost 80 years old body is capable of when it houses the spirit of God. One can hardly guess what it means to live in such a body, in freedom and loving strength, in a gentle, sublime flexibility which far surpasses our conceptions. There was something of this also in the movements of the three "dignitaries"; perhaps that is why it struck me so forcefully.

I do not remember ever having seen anything in Europe like the greeting between Ma and the three men—or rather, between Ma and the eldest of the three dignitaries, a man with sparkling eyes, a fresh youthful complexion and thick, silver-grey hair. He had a fine face. Perhaps I should say, his face was intelligent, fine-featured, as well as being strong and noble, exuding goodwill. His beard reached to the middle of his chest. He had never before met Ma, yet he greeted Her like an intimate friend or brother—joyfully, radiantly, relaxed and free, without the slightest trace of formal etiquette. Ma had gone towards him with palms joined in greeting. When he reached for Her hands She bowed low before him and laid Her face on his hands, while he also bowed low before Her. They remained for a few moments in this attitude of respect as if fully to enjoy the supra-personal tenderness of the encounter. Then they stood upright and smiled into each other's eyes, each reading the life of the other—right to the most secret wellsprings. But that may be merely our interpretation, our way of dualistic thinking. Perhaps I ought rather to say: each reading his own life in the eyes of the other, the ONE life. (In my diary is written at this point: "This is how the redeemed greet each other.")

Yesterday afternoon Ma met me between the ashram and the pandal. The road was unusually empty and only one of Her girls was following Her at such a distance that it seems to me in retrospect that Ma was quite alone when She met me. I had intended to go for a walk and had suddenly turned back. Thus it was, with this change in direction, that Ma unexpectedly appeared in front of me as if out of nowhere. Her face was almost completely hidden behind a yellow towel. As She reached me She suddenly drew the cloth aside as if uncovering a wound. Her face was disfigured and so swollen that one eye had completely disappeared and Her lips were gaping thick and feverish. Tears sprang to my eyes and I heard myself saying something in my mother-tongue which I would rather not repeat here. A long, questioning look from Ma's good eye met me. Then She covered Her face again with the towel and walked on. Naturally I was wondering why She uncovered Her face to me. Perhaps She knows that the question has often bothered me: do the Enlightened still suffer? In conversations with friends I often think that this possibility is all too easily ruled out. It must be an essential part of Hindu teaching to assume that beings like Ma are beyond all suffering, otherwise it would not be stated so frequently. (For the evidence of one's eyes does not support this assertion !). That they are beyond suffering can only mean that they are no longer in danger of being overwhelmed by it, as we are ! That is it ! A few years ago Ma said to me on one occasion, "When you all are happy and devoted to God, then this body of mine is completely healthy." And another time: "I am so closely linked to you all that you are like parts of my own body !" What a responsibility for each one of us ! But who is prepared and who has the strength to take on this responsibility as a deliberate, conscious act ? If only we would at least be shocked to the depths of our being, in face of Her suffering and our responsibility, our guilt. (But our psychological defence-mechanisms are speedily and precisely at work !).

Some years ago I was watching Ma attentively during an hour of meditation. At that time She was very ill. Everybody else would have remained in bed and consulted the doctor in a similar condition of high fever and constant cough. Though Ma's body was obviously in a frail and tortured condition and though Her face was that of an old and sick woman, there was no expression of suffering, but peace and inwardness. Only for the duration of one split second this changed completely. One of the girls interrupted

Ma's *dhyāna* with a whispered question : At this very moment the peace on Her face suddenly seemed as if broken into hundred fragments and there was pain, naked, almost unbearable physical suffering, the full, unveiled expression of what we feel, when we are very ill. Hardly had I realized this change, when it was reciprocated and again there was nothing but serenity and a peace far above all physical reaction.

I may be wrong but at that moment it struck me : Ma lives in a constant identification with Her Atman. Just now Her illness and the disturbance of her *dhyāna* caused a sudden interruption of Her natural condition, and for a split second She appeared to experience what is natural to us : an identification with our body and its suffering. But in the same second She cut herself off from this "wrong" identification and came back to what is natural to Her : the supernatural peace.

This sounds reasonable, but let us not assume that we are able to penetrate the secret, which is hidden in the relation between the Enlightened ones and the mystery of suffering. The little we can say, can only be expressed through paradox : There is suffering in non-suffering and non-suffering in suffering.

In the text of the Holy Communion we read, "Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world, grant us peace." That is exactly it—the sacrificial lamb suffers because he takes upon himself our imperfections in order thereby to redeem us from them. There is no other peace for us than that which they purchase with their patient suffering.

Yesterday when we gathered for the third procession, Ma's face-which in the early morning had again been dreadfully swollen—was somewhat improved; when we came home seven hours later, it was almost normal. The procession began at 11 o'clock in the scorching May sun. For seven hours Ma sat on the uncomfortable sedan-chair, continuously bestowing Her blessing with hands raised in greeting on the thousands of pilgrims who streamed along the way. Her body is almost 78 years old, fragile and at times frail. But how inexhaustible is the power of the soul over its weakness ! For seven hours, without a drop of water. in the burning sun, often shrouded for long periods in a cloud of dust which extends like heavy mist over the river-valley. Every little movement, the repeated clumsy halts of those pulling the sedan, must transmit itself as multiplied pain into that highly sensitive body. A landscape of thousands of human bodies spreads out on either side of the road. Faces, hair and clothing are covered with a thick layer of dust. Long before daybreak they have come with all their needs and sins, to await the darshan of the Mahatmas. the great ones, which promises salvation.

In our procession there is singing and at times dancing. But I see as well old folk stumbling barefoot along the stony road, feet streaming with blood, dripping sweat, exhausted, half-parched. Ma sees more than these suffering bodies. She sees the exhausted, bleeding souls and the desperate thirst for salvation. Never befor have I seen the glow of the *Karunabhāva* (compassion) on Her face for such long, simply endlessly long hours on end. With Her glance She encompasses everyone and everything. Later I hear Her say, "Everything was God, He was riding in procession on the road and on the right and left of the road He was waiting for Himself."

Our procession reaches the ashram between 6 and 7 in the evening. The commencement of the nightly *akhand-kirtana* for ladies had been scheduled for 8 o' clock. But we are all tired and need a few hours' rest. So the beginning is postponed. At 9 o'clock I come from my dharmasala to the ashram, refreshed. My first glance is upward to Ma's window. It is in darkness. "Thank goodness, She is having a little rest then, "I think Her girls had told me that She had rested but little the previous night. An hour later I suddenly see Ma entering the courtyard from the road. She has not allowed Herself even a moment's rest, but has been busy tidying up in the new guest-house. During the night kirtan I had plenty of opportunity to observe Ma. She didn't go to Her room once. Till 3 a.m. She was holding private conversations in Didima's *samadhi mandir*, summoning one person after another. At 3 o'clock finally the light went out. At 5-30 She was up again to bid farewell to followers from Bombay and then began the routine of one of Her occasional 24-hour "working days." I have never seen anyone work so joyfully and with such absolute selflessness as She does. Her work is to impart to those who crowd in upon Her in an unending stream the certainty that they are loved by God.

When the men had ended the *akhanda-kirtana* at 7 p.m. Ma was sitting in front of Her mother's samadhi. For the many who had bathed today in the Ganges, the Kumbh-mela had ended; but they all wanted Ma's personal blessing before setting out on their homeward journey. At times the pressure was so severe that a few strong men had to come to Ma's protection. For hours She sits completely motionless in the turmoil and shouting of the crushing mob, Her soul withdrawn. One has the feeling that only Her body is sitting there and it must be indescribably weary. But we do not spare Her : She has to sing. That alone is the conclusion of the Kumbh expected by everyone. It takes a long time, but finally consciousness has been summoned back into Her body and She sings, "*Dharo lao, dharo lao*...". I am sitting quite near Her, yet I can hardly hear Her voice, it is so soft, like a breath from another world. It is painful to hear Her singing so soundlessly, completely exhausted—or completely withdrawn, or both ?

Suddenly the electricity fails. Still Ma sits for hours in Her place before the samadhi, in order to put *prasāda* into the hands which reach out to Her from the darkness.

Unity of Prophets and Saints*

Baron H. P. Van Tuyll Van Serroskerken

It is not easy for a westerner to write in remembrance of the privilege he has enjoyed of coming a little in contact with Sri Sri Anandamayi Ma. She is wonderful, but that often misused word does not really convey much and in any case you people of India, know far better than we do how wonderful Mother is. We westerners have not the same right to write about saintliness as easterners have, who are much more at home in it. Moreover the talk of a pupil cannot be compared with the Voice of the Master. On the other hand it is almost a duty to say a word in thankfulness for all one has received.

I am a Sufi-pupil of Murshid Inayat Khan who was born at Baroda in 1882, who went to the west to preach the old and still new point of view of Sufism, who left there many pupils and who died at Delhi on Febr. 5th, 1927. In the beginning of 1950, I was in Banaras where Mother Anandamayi at that time held a reunion at Her Ashram and She received my wife and me very kindly. We had the privilege to be introduced to Her kirtanas and of having a talk with Her.

Being Sufis it was not strange for us to sit at the feet of a Hindu saint, since we regard all saints and sages as a door through which to enter the dwelling of God. But then there are so many who call themselves saint or guru or murshid without really being so. How can we ever be sure of recognizing one ? In the first place it must be said that if we err it is our own fault. False saints also have their tasks to fulfil in life, they give guidance to those who are not ready to receive the blessing of a real saint. And then there is a lesson which our Murshid taught us that we cannot recognize a saint by what he says or does but only by his atmosphere. "If you make yourself very meek and very mild, very still and quiet, free from any activity of the mind and you feel the presence of the Saint coming into your soul through your heart, a ray of the presence of God, a bliss, then you may be sure that he is a real one, a true Master." Moreover those who claim to be are never the real ones. I have met many of them in India and since Murshid Inayat Khan was in the west there have been false claimants there also in great numbers.

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The author of this article passed away a few ye ars ago.

But I have the conviction that at different times in my life I have met three real, great Saints, all from India of course, namely : Sri Ramana Maharshi, who died in 1950 at Tiruvannamalai; then Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan who went to America and Europe to preach what he called the Sufi-message, a new branch of an old tree; and thirdly Mother Sri Anandamayi.

This is my personal conviction. There is never a proof. But there is something that comes very near a proof, when one takes to heart the words of the prophets, instead of, as most people do, only taking those parts to heart which suit their own ideas.

Let me first state that I have known Ramana Maharshi only through his books, but they appealed to me very much and I have always felt a real contact with him. This may be imaginary, yet for me it has always been real.

Of Murshid Inayat Khan I was a pupil and for some time travelled with him as his secretary. Sri Anandamayi Ma I met at Banaras in 1950.

The remarkable proof now is that though they come from quite different spiritual traditions, these saints, all three of them, give—originally and independantly of one another—the one old Message in the same renewed outward garb. That shows that what they say together, all three of them, is the Message of God for this time. This is very remarkable.

If one compares the Message of the Lord Manu with that of Sri Rama or of Sri Krishna or of the Lord Buddha as to their outward form—which is always the answer to the needs of the time—there is an evolution to be noticed in them. A similar evolution is to be found in the Messages of the Jewish Prophets from Abraham to Jesus Christ and with the Moslem Prophets from Abraham to Mohammed. It is caused by the progress of time. Will these messages of God stop coming on earth? No, God's messengers will always keep coming on earth from time to time, as long as mankind is living in darkness. As it is said in the Bhagavad Gita :

"Whensoever and wheresoever virtue wanes and vice waxes, then and there do I create myself."*

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* Commentary of Sri Ramanujacharya.

The Teacher always comes with the one and only task to lead humanity nearer to God.

The inner part of the Message "man becoming actually united to God," which is an inner creation brought about on earth by God's Prophets, is wrought in silence, without words. The outward part of the Message is the expression in words that the mind can understand. In the outward garb of the message progress is noticeable, keeping pace with the capacity of understanding that people have in different ages. Therefore, religions are essentially one although outwardly differently expressed. For this reason also it is a virtue if people accept the teaching of a new Prophet without mixing it up so much with habits · and beliefs accumulated round the teachings of former Prophets. Holding fast to a former Message for too long, makes man lose his virtue of keeping to the one message of God wich is outwardly renewed every time. Keeping pace with the outward successive expressions of the Message is a great virtue. This is easily done by following what is called mysticism, because mysticism, the inner part of the Message, is always one and the same, be it Hindu, Moslem or Christian, be it in the line of the yogis or of the Sufis. The difference is in the outward side, the religious side. In their depths all religions are one; in their outward expression they show the difference of the ages in which they appeared. The time has come for inner understanding to become the property of the whole of humanity. Peace, not based on this inner understanding can never develop into a real brotherhood, a real democracy. Peace means peace in God and peace with mankind at the same time. It is the dharma of this age to create real brotherhood on earth.

The Arians from the west and the Arians from the east are one race which came, via the Kaukasus, from Egypt. They departed from there in two directions, one going to the west, the other to the east. They received from God two different ideals or tasks or dharmas : India to cultivate the heart and to seek God, and the west to develop organization and brotherhood. Now the time has come for them to blend and become one. Worshipping God and serving mankind are two sides of one and the same ideal. If only this were understood. The west should look to India in order to learn the realizations of God; and the east should take over from the west its organization which is the realization of brotherhood. Such a pity that those in India who at the moment try to follow the west are often inclined to let go the great virtue of India, the seeking of the realization of God. They often want to become even more western than the west. This exaggeration is understandable but it is to be hoped that it will not take them too long to find their balance. In the west, too, the balance is still far to seek. the conception of the realization of God, the inner side of religion or mystic life, has not been very much understood in the west.

Still, the evolution of mankind goes on and the ideal of the present time is for the east and the west to unite, to develop what Inayat Khan used to express in the words : "To make the whole of humanity as one single Brotherhood in the Fatherhood of God."

In the first ages at the beginning of manifestation there was no religion on earth, there was no need for it, because all mankind was naturally concentrated on God. All people had religious perfection (Mahabhārata, Vana Parva, Section 148). That was the first yuga. Afterwards, when man became more selfish and materialistic, he lost that natural union with God. That was the time when the Prophets; the Messengers, the Avatāras started to appear on earth. In the next yuga the first Prophets reflected in their teaching more or less the olden times. The Prophets were the Prophets of Brahma, like Rama or Abram or Abraham. Later came the Prophets of Siva who were ascetics, they taught yoga. At the beginning of the last and darkest age, the Kali Yuga, those who came to help the world were Prophets of Viṣṇu. It was Sri Krishna who inaugurated that new age. He brought to India the path of devotion, Bhakti Yoga. From that time onwards appeared in India saints and sages of the bhakti line, worshipping Sri Krishna.

Amongst the Jewish Prophets this new age was inaugurated by Christ and among the Arabs the followers of Abraham Ishmael by the Prophet Mohammed. Among yogis and Sufis the understanding and following of the path of devotion has since then been predominant as a new development of what still is, always has been and will be the inner life, the seeking of Truth. No wonder that Sufism and bhakti yoga are so much alike. The keynote of both is the love of God.

Prophets are one in being, all religions are one in their essence, mysticism in one all over the world. So their followers and exponents, the saints, are also one. Though they may have different methods of training their disciples, their goal and inner teaching are one and the same. What Hinduism calls the different gods and goddesses, Islam calls the different names of God. Well understood, there is no difference. However about things which are different outer expressions of what inwardly is one and the same truth, people fight and hate each other because it is their nature to fight like the animals.

When peoples say, "Your people have in the past done this and that to my people, have cruelly fought my people, therefore we have to go on hating and fighting each other," they show how little they are evolved spiritually. This attitude does not belong to the future age, to the Message of our time.

Brotherhood did not play its part, not because it was not preached, but because it was not accepted. In Vana Parva, Section 179, to the question, "Does not the distinction of caste become futile as long as conduct does not come into play," Yudhisthira answers, "In human society it is difficult to ascertain one's caste. Whosoever conforms to the rules of pure and virtuous conduct, him have I designated a Brahmana." Also the Lord Buddha declared himself at different ocasions against the caste system. More than a thousand years later there came to India a race with a living ideal of brotherhood; and this was what, among other things, they were meant to bring. Perhaps they did not bring it in the most friendly way, but oppression is always a warning from God. When not taken to heart, a more severe oppression or punishment may follow even in these present times. The destiny of history is prepared by ourselves and let loose by God as a serious warning. Not before 1900 was

God's word (already expressed in the Mahābhārata) not to keep the caste system as rigidly as was done before, beginning to be understood. The caste system was splendid in the age of Manu, becoming later less fitting, to become obsolete in our days. Of course Mahatma Gandhi did a great work for his native country but it should go on and not fall back again.

The Message of these days is harmony between castes and nations, between creeds and religions. Enemies of the past should forgive each other and join hands in building a new ideal. To forgive each other, because God Himself is always willing to forgive, brings a great blessing in life. And as for looking at the past, it is always wiser to consider what should be forgiven us than what we have to forgive others.

People nowadays judge God because of what we human beings cruelly did to each other, not seeing that our destiny was caused by ourselves. To obey God's Word and to listen to the prophets and saints is the greatest virtue and the safest way for mankind to take. Only if man wants to listen to God's Messengers and to understand that all saints and prophets are a unity and have together one Voice, he will be on a safe path.

Now let me show you how the three above mentioned saints, Sri Ramana Maharshi, Murshid Inayat Khan and Sri Anandamayi Ma, bring the same Message by which they inaugurate a new age. Therefore they are more than saints, they are prophets.

In the most inspiring booklet "Maharshi's Gospel" we find the question : "What is the highest goal ?" and

Sri Ramana's reply : "Self-realization." Later the question : "Who then is God ?" is answered with : "The Self is God, 'I am' is God." This is not the typical yoga point of view from before the days of Sri Krishna, which one still so often finds in India, but it is turning towards bhakti yoga of which, if universally looked at, Sufism is the latest exponent. The yogi's ideal is to reach God-realization through Self-realization and Sufism, just as bhakti yoga has as its ideal to attain to Self-realization through God-realization. This also forms part of the prophetic message of this age.

The central theme of Sri Anandamayi Ma's teaching is to be found in Her words : "All names are His Names, all forms His Forms, all qualities His Qualities, and the nameless and the formless are also He alone."

"Ascending and descending are one and the same thing, He who ascends is He who descends, and the acts of ascending and descending are also He."

"The intense desire for God-realization is itself the way to it."

"Without loving God you will not get anywhere. Remember this at all times."

"Pray to Him that you may continue to remain at His feet all the twenty-four hours of the day."

Compare herewith the answer Murshid Inayat Khan gave to the question : "Will you explain that the traveller on the path, the source and the goal is the I, the soul itself ?" "Not only the soul itself, but even God itself."

Murshid Inayat Khan's replies to the following questions also illustrate this point :

"Who is the Beloved of the Sufi ?" "God."

"Who is the God of the Sufi" "His very Being."

"What is the ideal of the Sufi ? "Man."

Still more remarkable from the point of view of the identity of the Messages of the three saints is what we read in "Maharshi's Gospel" : "There is really no reincarnation at all, either now or before." And again : "But the individuality of the person with *samskāras* is not lost."

This is for a Hindu teacher a very extreme point of view to take, though it must be said that the teaching about reincarnation in the Gita is not as rigid as it is believed to be. And does not the Chandogya Upanishad say : "Truly, one's fellowmen, departed once, do not get back to look at here."

Non-reincarnation has been the belief of the Islamic and Christian religions. But what does the Sufi teacher Inayat Khan say about it ?

"Non-reincarnation and reincarnation are both theories, the one as good and as false as the other. This concerns only a difference of words. It is not possible to express the Truth in words. Both theories are true to a certain degree." The soul does not reincarnate, the soul going from here returns to God; but it is the personality which reincarnates with a new soul coming from God. And later returning from her to God without touching the earth a second time again." "Every person is unique in his way, in this lies the secret of the oneness of God." Inayat Khan explained this very often. It is to be found among other things in his two books : "The Soul Whence and Wither" and to "The Mind-

World." It seems to me that Sri Ramana's and Inayat Khan's teaching on reincarnation are exactly the same.

"Soul is the life, and the light itself is God's own being." It is the personality that comes back. Every soul is God's eternal being, dressed when on earth in an old, a reincarnating personality. The more man realizes his soul, the more will he understand that he belongs to Eternity, and that his personality on earth is his garb, lent only for his life on earth. Man erroneously thinks that he is *a* soul, but in their deeper Self all beings are one and the same soul, the SOUL. All is God and God is all, "Reincarnation is a fact but not a truth," are words we have often heard the Murshid say.

"He who has been initiated by a Guru must under his direction try to keep his mind every minute of his life engaged in worship, japa, meditation, the perusal of sacred texts, in singing the praises of God, in satsang (sitting in the presence of the Guru or of a saint)," are Anandamayi Ma's words. This description would perfectly well do for the Sufi training. Inayat Khan described the training under a Murshid as consisting of unlearning and learning, of moral training, of meditation and prayer and of seeking the presence of the Teacher often and of keeping silence with him.

Some saints give more teaching, others keep more silence. But all do both, each at its own time. It all depends on conditions. The deeper side, however, of the Message is not in words but comes to life in silence in the Saint's presence. Light and illumination pass in this way from Master to pupil, from the Saint to his devotee. As

Inayat Khan says, "The Saint's, the Murshid's, the Guru's work is to make himself the globe through which the light is directed. And it is the pupil's work to respond, to keep his mind free from all other thoughts and feelings. The force is always working but its effect depends on the response."

There is not one atom of difference between the Message of God given in our age by these three saints, two coming from the yogi-line and one from the Sufi-line. And this is a very remarkable fact.

It is very remarkable indeed how Sri Ramana, Hazrat Inayat Khan and Sri Anandamayi Ma all were or are giving the same Message, bringing all the former Messages together as a unity. Because to realize God is one thing, but to bring a Message of God to the masses is a greater service to humanity.

The Message of God is always old and always new. To-day it becomes clearer than ever that God expects the whole world to understand His one and eternal Message in the same way, based on a deeper understanding of God, on love and harmony. What a blessing it would be for man to understand this and to forget all the fights and misunderstandings of the past. God is always willing to forgive, man would be blessed if he could practise this ideal himself.

The question which people are apt to ask, "Who is the greatest of these three saints ?" is altogether wrong. The Message of God is His Message, and to know this is enough for us. Saints and Prophets are one in the service of God. These three saints with a Universal Message, coming from different spiritual traditions, different aspects of the past, are one. Blessed is Indla where they were born and which, so to say, has given them to the world.

*

Mātri Lilā

(January 15th–April 15th, 1975.)

Mataji arrived in Vrindaban from Naimisharanya on January 16th. On Her way She halted in Lucknow for a couple of hours at the residence of Sri Rameshwar Sahai. The Governor of the U.P., Dr. Chenna Reddy came there for Her darśana and took Mataji to the Ry. Station in his own car.

On January 17th several boys received their sacred threads in Ma's presence. From January 18th to 25th two Bhagavata Saptahas were held simultaneously. The devotees at whose requests the Saptahas took place were Dr. Premlata Srivastava of Varanasi and Sm. Shubhadra Ben Pabary of Nairobi. Every afternoon the explanations of the Bhagavata in Hindi were given by Pt. Srinath Sastri in his lucid and vivacious manner. Sri Swami Vishnuashram of Suktal came and stayed at our Ashram for two days during that time. On January 25th one of the Brahmacharinis of our Ashram received her sacred thread. Mataji was expected to leave Vrindaban in the last days of January but She had the *kheyāla* that another Bhagavata Saptaha should be celebrated for which Dr. Saroj Paliwal, the Principal of the R. C. A. Girls' Degree College, Mathura, had been longing for years. She was sent for and the Saptaha was observed from January 27th to February 3rd.

Sri Nityananda Bhat of Vrindaban recited the Sanskrit text every morning and also gave the commentary in Hindi in the afternoons. On February 3rd evening Sri Swami Govinda Prakashji, the head of the Rama Thirtha Ashram, arrived to the great delight of everyone present.

A number of foreign devotees had come to spend some time with Mataji at Vrindaban. Among them was a young American couple with their baby daughter whom they had named Nirmala Sundari.

Mataji left Vrindaban by car for Delhi in the afternoon of February 6th. For full three weeks Mataji had blessed Vrindaban with Her holy presence. Now followed seven weeks of incessant, extensive peregrinations, north, east and west. Even the account of these quick movements is breathtaking. With the single exception of Ahmedabad where a Bhagavata Saptaha was held, Mataji never stayed in one place for more than three nights, often less.

Remaining in our Ashram at Kalkaji for merely three hours, Mataji left Delhi for Hardwar by the night train, alighting in Kankhal on February 7th, morning. On the 10th She motored to Dehradun and went straight to Her cottage at Panchavati, next to Kalyanvan where She remained until the 13th evening. Every evening Mataji came to the Kishenpur Ashram to give darśana and a few private interviews. On the 12th morning *Akkaṇḍa Rāmāyana* was started at the Rama Mandir in Kalyanvan, ending on the 13th at midday. Mataji came there once on the 12th and again for *Pūrnāhuti* (completion) on the 13th. At night Mataji boarded the train to Delhi.

There also She did not stay at the Ashram but went from the Railway Station directly to the new house of Sri G. S. Pathak at Nitibagh, where the upper floor has been specially built and reserved for Mataji's use. It comprises a small hall and a large veranda besides Mataji's set of rooms. Mataji called it an Ashram. There no crowd could collect. Every evening Mataji would go to the Kalkaji Ashram for a couple of hours and give darśana. On February 16th, Vasant Panchami day, Saraswati Puja was solemnly celebrated first at Nitibagh from 8-10 a.m. Sri Pathak has a permanent *vigraha* of the goddess. Chhobi Banerji had come from Calcutta and sang beautifully during the puja. Mataji also sang for some time. After the worship, the grandson of Mataji's brother was given his first lesson in reading and writing on this auspicions day which is dedicated to the goddess of learning, art and *Brahmavidyā*.

As soon as the function was completed, Mataji proceeded to the Ashram where the goddess was worshipped from 11 a. m. to 1 p. m. Naturally an immense crowd of devotees had assembled. There also Chhobi Banerji and others sang during the ceremony. After the pūjā, Mataji sat in front of the Siva Mandir and hundreds, who had formed a queue, filed past Her doing praṇāma, offering garlands, fruits etc. and some doing pūjā. The process, however, proved time consuming and when the pressure of people became intolerable Mataji got up and stood on the staircase leading to Her cottage, receiving offerings there. Hundreds could have Her darsana from below and catch garlands and fruits which Mataji kept on throwing down to them to their great delight. Brahmachari Nirmalananda had made excellent arrangements for prasāda of which most visitors partook. Mataji left the Ashram at about 2 p. m. In the evening She and Her party followed an invitation to the residence of Sri Sitaram Jaipuria and his family. The next morning Mataji again came to the Ashram for some time.

The same afternoon She boarded the train to Calcutta! with a few companions, reaching Howrah at 5-30 p. m. on February 18th. Even those who travelled with Ma did not know where She would stay. She went to Bhasa village near Behala on the Diamond Harbour Road, about 15 miles from Howrah Station. There She and Her small party were accommodated in the garden house of Sri Bibhuti Chakravarti, who had been instrumental in calling Mataji to Calcutta. The first evening was completely quiet. Nobody could guess Mataji's address. The next day She gave permission to let people know. Gradually the number of visitors eagar for Ma's darśana increased. But being quite far from the city, it was less crowded than at Agarpara. On February 21st Mataji went to Calcutta proper for the inauguration of Sri B. Chakravarti's new flat in Camac Street. That day She also visited the houses of a few devotees. On the 22nd She came to our Ashram at Agarpara and stayed overnight. An impetuous crowd collected for Her darśana. On the 23rd She returned to the garden house.

An interesting incident must be mentioned here. The garden house is situated in the midst of extensive grounds, comprising five ponds. Mataji was shown round and a little pet deer was brought to Her to which our host and his wife were greatly attached. However, the deer was quite ill. It gazed at Ma intently and Mataji also looked at it full of compassion. Someone remarked: "Now the deer will get well." Ma said : 'See, what happens !' The following night the pet died. Mataji said it had been a *Mahāpurūsa* and should be given proper samādhi. A pit was dug and filled with salt and the body of the deer was put into it. Ārati was performed. A small toy deer was later placed over the cemented cover in memory. The *Mahāpurusa* had obviously waited for Ma's darśana to be released from his animal body. One can only marvel at Mataji's līlā. Who is able to guess for whose sake Mataji goes where ?

On February 24th, Ma started for Varanasi, arriving there quite unexpectedly on the 25th morning. Mataji was to leave for Allahabad the next day, but as Swami Paramananda suddenly got ill, She prolonged Her sojourn until March 1st and took Swamiji with Her to Bombay for treatment. The day Mataji reached Varanasi was full moon day (*Māghi Pūrnimā*). So Satyanarayana Puja was performed in the evening in Gopal Mandir in great style. Kirtana was kept up during the pūjā and prasāda distributed to the huge crowd that had assembled. The next morning the reputed sitar player Sri Ravi Shanker came for Ma's darśana and spent some time with Her. In the evening the annual prize distribution ceremony of the Kanyapeeth was observed in Mataji's holy presence. Dr. K. L. Srimali, the Vice-Chancellor of the Benares Hindu University presided over the function. Many of the elite of the city and some high officials including the Vice-Chancellor of the Varanasi Sanskrit University, Dr. Karunapati Tripathi graced the occasion. They all witnessed the delightful programme gone through by the girls of the Kanyapeeth for about two hours. Mataji remained present throughout and gave Her blessings to each and every recipient of prizes. She seemed visibly pleased with the progress of the girls. She remarked more than once that the demeanour of the students, in fact every detail about them, conjured up the memory of the *Rishi kanyas* of ancient India.

In the morning of February 27th, Mataji accepted an invitation to the house of Dr. Srimali at the B. H. U. campus. She was seated on a tastefully decorated dais while *bhajanas* and kirtana were performed by the staff and students of the Music College.

On March 1st, Mataji drove to Allahabad and spent one night at the Satyagopal Ashram, leaving for Bombay on March 2nd. There also She remained for one night and a day only, proceeding to Ahmedabad on the 4th night. There She halted on March 5th at the residence of Sri M. K. Munshaw, travelling to Gondal at night, partly by car and and then by train, reaching on the 6th morning. A charming reception had been prepared for Mataji by the uncle and aunt of the Raja of Gondal who had requested Mataji to celebrate Sivaratri in their state. A procession was waiting for Mataji at the palace gate and escorted Her car to the pandal. It was headed by a music band, then 108 *kumārīs* (little girls) dressed in the colourful costume of Saurashtra, balancing on their heads small, daintily decorated vessels. A Gujarati Kirtana party followed with the Ashram Kirtana party at the rear. Mataji sat in the pandal for some time while pandits chanted from the Vedas and āratī was performed.

The same afternoon Mataji went on to Ranavav, a village near Porbander, where devotees had built a special house for Mataji's use a couple of years ago, but She had been unable to go there in person so far. Now at last Mataji graced Ranavav with Her presence for two days. Excellent, carefully thought out arrangements had been made. There was satsang [all day long in a huge pandal that had been provided for the occasion. Mahatmas delivered discourses, with *bhajana*, kirtana and recitation of Scriptures in between. The climax of every day was "Mātri Satsang" at night when Ma replied to questions very generously and also sang kirtana. The news of Mataji's visit and the programme of satsang had been anounced in the papers and so an enormous congregation gathered on both days from neighbouring towns and villages.

On March 7th, Mataji went to Porbander for a few hours. She visited Mahatma Gandhi's birth-place, a number of temples and the Gurukul, an institution with one thousand students. A reception was given to Mataji in the school-hall. The students chanted prayers very beautifully, Mataji then sang and finally spoke to the children. In the morning of March 8th, Ma Yogasakti came to see Ma and spent a few hours with Her. The same evening Mataji returned to Gondal.

On March 9th and 10th, Mataji visited a famous temple of Bhuvanesvari at Gondal, an institution for women and a Girls 'School. There songs and Garbha dances were displayed before Mataji and She Herself sang for a short while. Mataji also followed an invitation of H. H. the Raja of Gondal to his palace gardens.

The pandal at Gondal was of imposing size and thousands flocked from everywhere in Gujerat and Saurashtra for Mataji's darśana. At night Mātri Satsang was held there also.

On the 11th, Sivaratri Puja took place all night. So far Sivaratri had been celebrated in Ma's presence every year in one of Her ashrams. This was the first time that it took place in Gujerat and at someone's invitation. Many of the two hundred *vratis* who came to participate in the all night worship after a complete fast throughout the preceding day, had not even witnessed the festival ever before. The collective pūja had been arranged on the spacious veranda of the palace, while Mataji took up Her seat in the porch just outside, surrounded by a few who watched. Exquisite ķirtana was sung in the intervals between the four pūjās. Several first class singers had come, headed by Chhobi Banerji. Mataji was present most of the night and as usual on this occasion sang in the small hours, when people are in danger of dozing off.

On March 12th, Mataji left by car for Ahmedabad alighting there the same night. On the way She visited two places and a temple at Rajkot. In the temple area an enormous pandal had been specially erected, although Mataji remained there only for about twenty minutes. Here also thousands paid their homage to Her.

On the 13th morning a Bhagavata Saptah started in a spacious pandal at the residence of the niece of the late Sri Kantilal Munshaw, Sm Sneha Vina Shah at Shahibagh, Ahmedabad for the spiritual uplift of her deceased husband.

A thatched hut had been built for Mataji's personal use. The explanations in Gujerati were given twice daily for several hours and Mataji attended each session for a short time. In the evening She would sometimes visit the houses of devotees, At night "Mātri Satsang" was held and on some days Ma replied to questions.

On March 21st, Mataji boarded the night train to Bombay, reaching there the next morning. A very large crowd collected for Her darśana at Vila Parle. Mataji left on the 23rd night for Delhi where She spent just one night at our Kalkaji Ashram on the 24th, leaving far Moradabad by car the next morning.

At Moradabad Sri Hari Babaji's devotees had made elaborate arrangements for the celebration of the 91st birthday of the Mahātmā who took Mahāsamādhi in 1970 in Ma's presence. The celebrations continued from March 22nd to 27th. Mataji followed the urgent invitation of the devotees and arrived there on the 25th afternoon. There was uninterrupted chanting of Mahamantra throughout the six days and nights in a devotee's house. A large pandal had been provided for daily performances of Rāsalīlā by Sri Haribabaji's favourite Rāsa party from Vrindaban and for the daily afternoon and evening programme of discourses by Mahātmās. On the 25th evening the pandal was completely smashed by a severe hailstorm. Fortunately not a single person was hurt. Another pandal was improvised in a different place the next morning. Mataji watched the Rāsalīlā for a short while and gave darśana in the afternoon during a few lectures. On the 27th a very charming little temple with a surprisingly life-like statue of Sri Haribabaji in the centre and beautiful *vigrahas* of Radha-Krishna and Nitai-Gouranga to his right and left, was consecrated in Mataji's presence. The temple is in the courtyard of the house of a devotee who was largely responsible for the arrangement of the festivities. The 27th was the climax of the celebrations being Holi and also Sri Haribabaji's birthday. Mataji does not play Holi anymore as She used to in former years. However, Her people were allowed to offer flowers and coloured powder at Her feet and Mataji put dry red powder on everyone's forehead.

On the 28th midday, Mataji left for Naimisharanya for a much needed rest. From there She arrived in Kankhal on April 8th for the *sannyāsa utsava* of Didima and the first anniversary of the consecration of her Samādhi Mandir on April 14th.

At Kankhal Mataji is usually in very good form and keeps good health. Her *kheyāla* these days is chiefly on Kankhal and Naimisharanya. The daughter of the renowned south Indian singer Sm. Shubhalakshmi, Sm. Radha, herself an accomplished musician, was present until the 12th and on two or three evenings delighted us with her sweet songs. Mahamandaleshwara Sri Prakashanandaji of Jagadguru Ashram would come daily and give short, but inspiring talks during the evening satsang in the Ashram courtyard. On the 11th Mataji went to his Ashram to grace the completion of a Bhagavata Saptaha. There also Sm. Radha regaled the large andience with her lovely songs and Mataji Herself sang for a short while.

On the 14th, the new, very large hall of our Ashram was opened with elaborate ceremonies. *Nagar kirtana* round the Ashram area started at 4 a. m. and at about 6^{30} a. m. several deities namely, Sri Narayana, Sri Padmanabh, Sri Radhakrishna and others were carried in procession from the Siva temple to the hall where pūjā and later havan were celebrated until about 1 p. m. in one part of the hall. Simultaneously satsang was held in the other part of the hall. First kirtana, then recitation of the Gita, Chandi, Upanishad, Bhagavata, followed by discourses of various Mahatmas between 10 a. m. and 12 p. m. Mataji was present from early morning in the hall, except while pūjā was performed in Didima's Samādhi Mandir between 8 and 10 a. m. The functions were followed by a feast given to sanyāsis and to all present. On April 15th Mataji followed an invitation to Bhagavad Dhāma, Hardwar where a large gathering was held. Mataji was asked to talk but She sang instead.

On April 16th night, Mataji travelled to Naimisharanya where the consecration of Puran Purusa Mandir is scheduled for May 14th and a Bhagavata Saptah from 9th to 16th. Soon after, Mataji is expected to go to Calcutta where Her birthday will be celebrated from May 22nd to 30th. Mataji was born in 1896 and is completing Her 79th year. From the depths of our hearts we all unite in the fervent prayer that Mataji may graciously remain in our midst in perfect health and vigour for many, many years and bless this sorrow- stricken world by Her holy presence.

* * *

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Ānanda Vārtā

A quarterly journal dealing mainly with the divine life and teaching of MATA ANANDAMAYEE and with other religio-philosophical topics

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Ānanda Vārtā

Vol. XXII] JULY, 1975 [No. 3

The One who is the Eternal, the Atman,
He Himself is the pilgrim on the path of Immortality,
He is all in all, He alone is.

Mātri Vāni

God builds fate—He is not only the maker of fate, He Himself is also fate; keep this in mind. When one speaks of destiny, it is as He decrees—here rules and regulations do exist. World (*jagat*) means that which moves and individual (*jiva*) that which is in bondage. In this state fate and restraint, rules and regulations, activity, are in force. As ordained by the Great Mother, whatever is the result of any action that She will bestow without fail.

* * *

Where a true bhakta (lover of God) is, the Sadguru will most certainly manifest in person. When there is need of a Guru, his appearance is but natural. So long as one has not found one's Guru, the ordinary person's duty is to engage in the study of Scriptures, in japa, meditation, the chanting of God's name—any Name one likes best. In order to reach the state of a genuine bhakta one must constantly devote oneself to *satkriyā*, action which aims at the Eternal.

* * *

It is Ma's *kheyāla* that you should live in the pursuance of the Supreme Object of life, constantly remain in this atmosphere—so that He Himself may stand revealed. Men and women of the most varied temperaments and conditioning gather round Ma. One lives in an Ashram to drive away the habit of considering others as distant from oneself which is foolishness. Mataji does not send anyone away. By prolonged residence in a *satsthān*, in other words, a place dedicated to God and the search after Truth, and by *satsang*, the company of saints and seekers after Truth, *sadbuddhi*, true understanding, will be awakened.

* * *

This body (Mataji) does not call any ashrams into being. Where *shrama* (weariness) is not, there one can speak of an Ashrama. Beyond the universe and extending over the entire cosmos is only one single Ashrama—where there are lakes and oceans, where there is no such thing as one's own country and foreign countries, which contains whatever anyone may ascribe to it.

* * *

Ashramites must not pay attention to honour or insult, to praise, position and fame. Everything has to be surrendered at the feet of the Lord. Have you not chosen this life, renouncing everything! To be insulted (*apmān*) means to bear animosity willingly (*apa mene nowa*). In all shapes is He alone—be friendly and affectionate towards all.

* * *

Like a hero, taking refuge in patience attend to your duties. Don't fall a prey to despair, don't be broken. One must remember that just as good times do not continue for ever, so God can also put an end to bad times. While repeating God's name mentally carry out whatever happens to be your duty.

* * *

Father has written that he finds no joy (*rasa*) in the spiritual. So long as one has not crossed over the desert, dryness will not go. At present the One has taken on the guise of dryness, so there is hope that He may also let Himself be found as delight (*rasa*). For how many lives have you not been in the body to reap the fruits of your actions. Your longing for the taste of divine delight will make you a pilgrim from the realm of want to the realm of your true being. Body means want—want of completeness, fulfilment, perfection.

Mātri Satsang

Swami Bhagavatananda Giri

(Translated from Hindi)

Ardha Kumbha Mela,
Triveni, Prayag.
February 6th, 1948.

A devotee : I like your teaching very much.

Mataji : This is very good. But you have to follow to the letter the instructions of your Gurudeva. With every breath, day and night, you should repeat the mantra received from your Guru. In the shape of the mantra your Gurudeva is always with you. Carry out his orders with great precision. Even if, since your receiving the mantra, your Guru has attained to *Nirvāna*, still the Guru-mantra will pave the way to Self-realisation.

Question : Should one have more than one Guru ?

Mataji : When you dig a well you have to dig in one place. Then only will you for all time be able to draw sweet, refreshing water. If you start digging a well today here and to-morrow somewhere else, how can you ever get water ? We are told that the great Guru Dattatreya had accepted twenty-four Gurus. But these were instructors who taught him. *Dikṣa* (initiation) must be taken from one Guru only. The same path will not do for everyone. However, every person must specially bear in mind that the commands of one's Guru must be followed implicitly to the minutest detail. Whether one lives or dies, the Guru's orders must at all times be carried out with single-minded devotion. Without such dogged devotion, how can anything be achieved in God's empire? Wherever you may go, keep in mind that everything all around belongs to your Gurudeva. This attitude of a purified mind comes about of itself. One may certainly also profit from the teachings of other mahātmās, provided they be in tune with those of one's own Guru. But if a mahātmā tells you something that clashes with the commands of your own Guru, it is not right to follow it. You should not even go near such a mahātmā, because this may prove harmful (*aniṣṭa*) to you. Do you know what *aniṣṭa* means? That which can never be *aniṣṭa* (harmful), that verily is the *Iṣṭa*. When you have the good fortune of meeting great men and of listening to their words, you should understand that these wonderful opportunities have presented themselves by the grace of your Sadguru, because you have taken refuge in Him. Feel: "All this good luck is due to the mercy of my Gurudeva." One must try to see one's Guru and one's *Iṣṭa* in everything in the world. To obey the injunctions of one's Guru implicity is the highest *dharma* (duty).

Question: If after having been initiated one's Guru attains Nirvana and is therefore liberated, will the Gurudeva have to come back to get liberation for his disciple ?

Mataji : If you think that your Guru has attained final release, then also He will find ways and means of helping and guiding you although you may not be aware of it. Your Guru is your all. When by His grace you will have found God then you will come to know this. When you desperately yearn for the vision of the merciful, adorable Lord and invoke Him with a sincere heart full of intense devotion, He will surely listen to your call. Appearing to you exactly in the form in which you love Him most and desire to have his vision, He will give you complete satisfaction.

February 7th, 1948.

In the morning some reading of Scriptures is going on in the Satsang tent, Mataji is present and listens. When the reading is over, a devotee asks :

"Mataji, how can the mind be made one-pointed ?"

Mataji : Take good care of the mind which can be compared to a child. If you serve the mind well it will get into the habit of being calm.

Question : Should one then act according to the dictates of the mind ?

Mataji : Do you obey your children ? If you patiently explain to children again and again, this will have a result. Remember that in order to control their children, parents choose the best company for them, that is to say, satsang. If children are given nourishing, wholesome food and are kept in the company of wise people, they gradually take a liking to their studies. Real sustenance for the mind is provided by satsang and the constant remembrance of God. Give more time to the thought of Him than to anything else. Japa, meditation, the company of saints and sages, worship, recitation of scriptures, chanting hymns in praise of God, the repetition of mantras—all these constitute the proper diet for the mind. By partaking of it the mind will gradually calm down and become one-pointed. Just as when a small child is given a toy, he will stop crying and start playing with the toy, forgetting everything else. Therefore keep your mind constantly engaged in some pure and holy work. The mind should ever be busy with some God-centered activity. The Iness with which you perform all your work must with all its intelligence and energy be consecrated to actions aiming at the Supreme One. Lay whatever you do at His holy feet. Thereby all your undesirable tendencies will be obliterated. This is the way to serve your child, the mind.

Question : I am full of anger; what am I to do? How can I get rid of it?

Mataji : Get absorbed in the worship of God and anger will take to its heels, your temper will cool down. A man who gets angry is out of his senses. He becomes red in the face. Firy sparks flash from his eyes. Just as when a single drop of poison falls into the best, sweet milk, the whole of it is spoiled, so anger creates havoc in you. Someone related that a mother became very furious at the time of feeding her baby. As a result the infant died on the spot. Excessive anger had poisened the mother's milk. Wrath means death—therefore never allow deadly anger to take possession of you. The evil tendencies of the person whom you condemn or with whom you become enraged will enter into you. What do you gain by this ? Why do you want to have a share in sin ? You should engage in good and godly actions that will blot out sin and evil tendencies. Never make common cause with anger.

Question : What is the expedient for getting rid of anger ?

Mataji : When a plant becomes dry, what do you do ? You water its roots. Similarly when your body feels the lack of energy, what do you do ? You have a substantial meal. The root cause of anger is foolishness (*durbuddhi*).

Question : How does one acquire the power to eradicate anger ?

Mataji : How one acquires power ? By doing exactly as one's Guru prescribes. Carry out the orders of your Guru who is the ocean of compassion and mercy. Seek the company of sādhus and mahātmās. Whenever anger arises call to mind that the road of anger is the road to death. Whereas you must tread the path to immortality. Therefore never lose your temper. Spend more and more of your time in the thought of God, practise japa, meditation or other spiritual exercises, attend religious meetings and read sacred books. By thus watering the roots of your being you will acquire plenty of power.

Question : Mataji, you have said, one should divert one's desires and cravings to the attainment of God-realization. What does this mean ? Please explain !

Mataji : When a small child needs something, he cries and his mother takes him on her lap. Likewise you must just think constantly of your beloved God and He will grant you whatever you desire. You cannot remain divorced from God. In whatever shape a devotee wishes to see God, in that very shape He gives him *darśana*.

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"If you place on one side of the scales all spiritual practices and efforts, and on the other silence, you will discover that silence outweighs the others.

We should love silence so that the world may die in our hearts."

St. Isaaac of Syria

From the Life of Mataji

Bithika Mukerji

(Continued from the January 1975 issue)

The Kumbh Mela and Bholanath's death in 1938.

1938 was the year of the *kumbha* at Haradwar. The *kumbhamela* (the festival of the *kumbha*), is a religious event of great moment for all Hindus. This festival is held in rotation of three years, at four places, viz, Prayag, Haradwar, Nasik and Ujjain, so that each town has a turn after twelve years. The festivals in Haradwar in April and in Prayag in January are considered specially important. Pilgrims from all corners of India foregather on the banks of the Ganges, to bathe in it on the auspicious days and at the indicated times. People put up in all kinds of impromptu shelters, such as tents, straw huts or any other type of temporary construction. The residents of the town meet such members of their family and friends, they have not seen for decades.

All pilgrims are expected to gather under the banner of their own *pandā* (the professional caretakers of pilgrims at holy places), for facilities of food and shelter. The fluttering of differently marked flags of the *pandās*, indicate their destinations to the pilgrims from afar. The riverside becomes alive with the voices of thousands of people. The highlight of the *mela* is the gathering of all the ascetic orders of the Hindu religion. This is one place and time when the lay people get glimpses of all the *sannyāsa āśramas* (ascetic orders). In accordance with the tradition of the *kumbha*, the sadhus are shown the highest respect and given precedence over all other participants. The lay people go around visiting the camps of the renowned ascetics, monks or *sadhus*, listening to discourses on their favourite scriptures or attending other religious events, or simply joining in any *kirtan*. As a matter of fact, one may hear the strains of *kirtan* at some camp or another, from almost any corner of the vast camp-site. For one month or so, people live in the exhilerating atmosphere of a joyful festivity.

Mataji has called the *kumbha*, the *dhvajā* (sign, emblem, banner) of the Hindu dharma. Mataji's description seems singularly apt when we consider the various elements which combine to make possible such an extraordinary occurrence as the *kumbhamela*. Just as a banner is indicative of the place where people gather actuated by the same purpose, so perhaps is the *kumbha*, a place and time which discloses to the Hindu his religion as an option which is viable (*śreyas*) and is to be existentially experienced as such. The tradition brings together the ascetic as well as the householder in an experience of personal commitments (*sankalpa*) to the common goal. This again recreates the opportunity of a religious experience which is indicative of the dimension of freedom inherent in it.

Mataji, in general, accepts invitations and suggestions for attending the kumbha festivals, mostly because Her presence makes it possible for many people to take part in it. Hundreds of devotees have had occasion to become alive to Her kindness and thoughtfulness in bringing the *kumbha* within the bounds of possibility for them. In 1938, Mataji already happened to be in Haradwar, having arrived there a few months before. She was staying at the house of Dr. Pitambar Panth on the bank of the Ganges. Dr. Panth had retired from service and had settled in Haradwar. He had met Mataji previously when She had been travelling around with Virajmohini Devi. While in Etawah, Mataji had suffered from some stomach upset. Dr. Panth, who was the civil surgeon of the town at the time, had brought some medicines for Her. Mataji had said to him that although it was not Her *kheyāla* to take any medicines at the time, if ever She did have the *kheyāla*, perhaps She would begin by placing Herself under his medical care. It so happened that Mataji was quite ill at the beginning of the year. She ran high temperatures and suffered from pain in Her arms. While in Dehradun, the doctors wanted to treat Her for the fever which became very alarming at times. Bholanath was put in a quandary over this matter because he knew only too well that the course of Mataji's *kheyāla* should not be interfered with. The new devotees of Dehradun, however, not knowing Mataji so well, began to demur at Bholanath's reluctance to put Her under medical treatment. At length, he gave way in the face of general opinion and agreed that Mataji should be treated by the much respected Dr. Some of Dehradun. When this question of medical treatment came up, Mataji recalled Her words spoken to Dr. Panth years ago. Somebody came up with the information that Dr. Panth had retired from service and was living in nearby Haradwar. Mataji thus had the *kheyāla* to go to Haradwar and contact Dr. Panth. He was overjoyed to see Her again but very troubled to find Her ailing. He agreed to prescribe medicine for Her but he did this with great hesitation. He said to Her, "I can prescribe only for ordinary people. My medicine is not going to be effective unless you have the *kheyāla* to terminate this illness. Please, for our sake, get well now."

Mataji became seriously ill from the first day of Her taking the medicines. To Her alarmed companions She said smilingly, "Why do you have such distaste for the illnesses ? I don't ask any of you to go away, do I ? The illnesses want to be with me for some time. I am not 'ill'. But if I take medicines then naturally I have to be ill."

Acceding to Dr. Panth's request, Mataji came to his house on the Ganges in the last week of February. It was a spacious house and slowly began to fill up with visiting devotees. Mataji gradually began to walk about a little. Her illness and recovery, as always, followed a pattern of their own, not correlated with the intake of medicines. Throughout this time She continued to receive people as usual and talk to them. There was a constant flow of guests from Delhi, Dehradun, Bareilly and other places. Niraj Nath Mukerji came with his family from Etawah for a few days. Bholanath was very pleased with Niraj's young son, Bindu, whose singing was liked by everyone. Bindu learned to sing kirtan and accompanied Bholanath on his *nagar-kirtan*, sometimes hoisted on his shoulders, so that the boy's voice could be heard over the general din of the crowds.

Bindu's mother asked one day, "Is it necessary to perform the yogic disciplines of *āsana*, etc. ?"

Mataji replied, "It is advisable always to discipline oneself. After all everybody is sitting or standing or lying in some posture or other. The bodily attitudes reveal the state of the mind. It can be easily seen that all feelings and emotions are related to a stance of the body. The mind can be controlled only when the body is adjusted appropriately. But one must not despair. The mind which appears to be singularly unamenable to discipline, is also to be appreciated as a great 'ascetic'. It is never satisfied with what is given here but is forever turning away to look for something beyond !"

Haradwar was becoming crowded with the rush of pilgrims for the coming *kumbha* on April 13th. Bholanath was always happy on such occasions of religious significance. Every morning, he would collect all available men and set out walking through the streets of the town, singing kirtan (*nagar-kirtan*). His tall and dignified personality commanded respect from all passers-by. Strangers came up and bowed to him and stayed to swell the throng of his *kirtan* party.

On April 13th, the final day of the festival, Bholanath accompanied by a great crowd of devotees went to *Brahmakunda* for the ceremony of the bath. He was spontaneously acclaimed by the other ascetics gathered there for the same purpose. They did not know who he was but must have perceived in him an exalted personality commanding respect.

Unknown to others Bholanath, while bathing in the holy river, performed by himself the rituals of adopting formally a life of renunciation. This was in pursuance of some conversation he had had with Mataji, earlier.

At the conclusion of the kumbha, the pilgrims are always in a great hurry to leave the town, creating difficult travelling conditions. The devotees thought it better that Mataji should leave immediately by car for Dehradun. Bholanath stayed behind to escort all those who wished to go on to Dehradun. It was easier to find railway accomodation from Dehradun at this time rather than from Haradwar. At the conclusion of a function Mataji is always required to move first, sometimes at great inconvenience to Herself, because while She is there hardly anybody likes to leave, if he can spend a few more hours or days with Her. This becomes a problem for those who are in charge of providing food and shelter because with Mataji all arrangements have to be impromptu and temporary. So the easiest method of striking camp is for Mataji to leave for another place.

In Dehradun many people, who had been with Her in Haradwar, bade Her reluctant farewells. Jyotish Guha's daughter, Buni, cried so much that everyone's heart was touched. Mataji said to her, "Why do you cry for somebody who is smiling ?" All those who have come close to Mataji will have experienced for themselves that this question is unanswerable.

On April 24th, Didi's father Swami Akhandananda and Bholanath returned again to Haradwar to attend the *samuāsa* ceremony of Akhandananda's brother, Kunja Mohan. Bholanath was feeling indisposed but did not regard it seriously. Mataji said to Didi, "Bholanath is going to be very seriously ill." Didi, alarmed at these words wished to pursuade Bholanath not to undertake the trip, but Mataji said again, "You may try, but he will insist on going and the illness is also inevitable."

Bholanath returned from Hardwar with a high fever and complaining of pain in his stomach. The fever persisted and in a few days the doctors pronounced that he was suffering from chicken-pox.

Mataji said quietly to Her companions, "It does not appear to me to be chicken-pox. You see, the diseases reveal themselves to me just like persons. The personification seen by me is described as being much more fearful than chicken-pox. I do not know about symptoms, but I can tell you what I have seen."

Within a short while nobody was left in doubt about Bholanath's illness which turned out to be the dreaded small-pox. Bholanath was given the best medical treatment available in the town and the very loving care of the devotees but the terrible nature of the disease made him suffer excruciatingly. Mataji visited his room at frequent intervals and made such suggestions for his care and comfort as She alone knew how to.

Bholanath's condition deteriorated rapidly. Everyone was in despair at this sudden calamity. At this crucial time Mataji unexpectedly asked Didi and Swami Akhandananda to leave Dehradun immediately and to take Didima with them. Although Mataji had spoken quietly in Her usual manner, Didi knew that this was one of those occasions when Mataji's *kheyāla* was not to be gainsaid. To forestall any pleadings, Mataji further said, "It must be either all of you or I. If you do not leave, I shall." This was not to be thought of, so Didi with great misgivings in her heart, and in utter dejection of spirit at being obliged to leave Mataji under such difficult conditions, set about making arrangements for their immediate departure. Swami Akhandananda expressed his bewilderment by saying, "Ma, why are you sending us away when we require as many as we can have here to look after Bholanath ?"

Mataji said gently, "You are a *samnyāsi*. You are not required to render Bholanath any physical service. The only way you can be of help to him is to engage steadfastly in your own undertaking of the contemplative life."

To inconsolable Didima, She said, "Is it not agonizing for you to watch Bholanath's suffering ? At this time he does not require your physical presence. You can help him by your prayers and healing thoughts. Do that for him now." To Didi, to whom nothing at all makes any sense apart from Mataji, She could only enjoin patience and fortitude.

Didi and others left for Varanasi on May 4th. Mataji spent most of Her time in Bholanath's room. Bholanath had been calling out to Her 'Ma' like a child in distress and Mataji responded to his call naturally and spontaneously. Death had dissolved the unauthentic barriers to a disclosure of this relationship. Bholanath now was not self-conscious anymore in showing his total surrender, publicly. On the last day of his life Mataji sat by his bedside and asked him, "Are you in great pain ?" Bholanath replied that he was but that he could not quite locate where the pain was His whole body was under the influence of the dread desease on his side and his suffering could be imagined easily. He was lying on his side and Mataji was seen to pass Her hand over his entire body, from head to toe and seemed to have done some *kriya* over it. After some time, in answer to a question, Bholanath replied that he did not have any pain and he was completely relaxed. Since the beginning of the illness, this was the first time, he was at peace.He murmured "Ānanda."

At one time he said, "I am going." Mataji responded by saying, "Why do you think so ? There are no goings or comings, but a presence only where there is no room for such things." Bholanath seemed to agree, saying, "Yes, so you have said always." Mataji's hand was on Bholanath's head when he breathed his last on the night of May 7th, 1938. His death was calm and peaceful. For the people who were keeping vigil at his bedside this created in the face of the most mysterious event of life an atmosphere of reverence.

The man who had so joyfully and so completely given of himself in the service of Mataji and who was like a beloved parent to the devotees was no more.

(To be continued)

Mataji and Puran Purush at Naimisharanya

R. K. Banerjee

This is not only the story of how an exquisitely beautiful golden-coloured *astadhātu* (eight metals) image of Puran Purush arrived at Naimisharanya at 10-30 P. M. on the 8th of Jan., 1975 from Calcutta, but also the story of Mataji's infinite mercy and compassion in fulfilling the innermost thoughts of all who happened to be fortunate enough to be in Her vicinity during the ensuing seven days. The holy site of Naimish Kshetra has been hallowed from time immemorial by the Lila of gods and goddesses, and 60,000 wise and learned Rishis continually meditating on God, as related in our ancient scriptures. In fact, there is not a single Purāna or Epic, wherein mention of Naimisharanya does not find a prominent place.

On this occasion Mataji extolled the virtues of the site of our Ashram with Her own lips by stating that the place had been rendered sacred in each of the preceding Yugas. In the Satya Yuga, Manu himself and his wife Satarupa, who had no issue, prayed devoutly to God on the banks of the Gomati, near the present temple of Manu at Vyas Gaddi, seeking God's favour in earnest ; so much so, that when He finally appeared to the praying couple and graciously told them to ask for any boon, they unswervingly prayed to be granted a son very like the Lord Himself.

In reply the Lord said that it was not possible for anybody to be "like Him", so He would Himself be born to them in each Yuga. Thus in the Treta Yuga, He came as Sri Rama, and in Dwapar Yuga, as Sri Krishna.

To satisfy certain of those present with modern scientifically inclined minds, Mataji went on to describe how three distinctly separate and successive layers of civilisation had been discovered recently while digging two deep tube wells within our Ashram compound. Geologically it can be imagined how the Gomati, in successive generations of flooding, had deposited newer and higher layers of silt on the surrounding areas, possibly resulting in the formation of a mound called Hanuman Tila, next to which our Ashram has been built on a high level locally termed as the "camp of the Pandavas". At the peak of Hanumam Tila exists a very ancient Hanuman temple, built like a fort, containing a deep cave inside the temple which is said to have access to the Gomati.

This brings us to the latest known heavy flood that was witnessed during the late monsoon of 1960, after which Mataji was present in Naimisharanya for a wonderful Samyam Saptaha, followed by a magnificent reading of 108 Bhagavatas simultaneouly for a week.

This date, so far as is known to devotees, can be said to be the origin of how our Naimisharanya Ashram came into being. During a subsequent phase, in Nov-Dec. 1968, Swami Sri Akhandananda Saraswati held his famous *Bhagavata Parāyana Paksha* at our Naimisharanya Ashram, and it was then that the germ of an idea was formed in his mind (possibly through the *kheyāla* of Mataji) to request Her to instal an image of Puran Purush to be worshipped in our Ashram. The statues of Sukdevji and Vyasdevji had then just been erected alongside our library which contains all the Purānas, and a site to the north of the Puran Mandir was earmarked for a Puran Purush Temple.

It will be appreciated that in the secular part of his life Swami Akhandananda had worked as secretary of the Gita Press at Gorakhpur, and had then come across an ancient picture of Puran Purush as depicted by an old artist in a copy of our scriptures. He had later used this picture as a cover page of certain subsequent editions of his religious quarterly "*Chintamani.*"

The Puran Purush, i. e., the heart and soul of all Puranas, or Narayana himself, is pictured as a Brahmin with the aquiline nose of a parrot, seated in *padmāsana* pose on an elaborate solid *āsana,* resting his back on a bolster, with a suitable canopy as a backdrop. The left hand is raised in *abhaya mudrā*—in benediction—and the right hand is placed near the right knee, counting beads. It must be emphasized here that such an image will be unique throughout the length and breadth of India.

With just a copy of this cover picture of Puran Purush we in Calcutta were allotted the task of preparing a two feet high clay model so as to satisfy Mataji's first inspection.

After certain initial fruitless attempts on a small scale, our efforts to fabricate a full-size clay model commenced in earnest in July 1973, and by September a photograph of the model was sent to Swami Paramananda for Mataji's comments. These were promptly received and the model rectified accordingly, so that the more difficult work of casting the image under the expert guidance of the late Nitai Pal's chief assistant commenced in November 1973.

In the morning of March 6th, 1974, while motoring to Ranaghat from Jodhpur Park, Mataji inspected the freshly cast image of Puran Purush by the roadside from Her car, and expressed Her general approval. So the work of casting the three other pieces, namely the *āsana*, the back-rest pillow, and the background was then taken up with renewed vigour.

Meanwhile Swami Akhandananda had been keeping indifferent health. So, although the whole image was completed, polished and packed by June 1974, efforts at despatching the three crates concerned were abandoned thereafter until the cold weather of 74-75.

Eventually in December 1974, we received the all clear from Swami Paramananda, and the image was taken out of its packing, repolished and repacked for despatch to Naimisharanya by rail, for possible installation between the 8th and 15th Jan. 1975.

But here again there was a hitch. After his strenuous Kanpur tour, Swami Akhandananda expressed his unwillingness to proceed straightway with the arduous work of installing Puran Purush in the coldest time of the year. So, although the next auspicious date was fixed for Akshay Tritiya on the 14th May 1975, we were instructed to bring the three crates with us by the Amritsar Mail leaving Calcutta on Jan. 7th.

To collect 200 Kg of net metal packed in crates from a narrow lane in Kumartuli in North Calcutta, and then load them on a particular day in a particular train was too cumbersome an operation except when entrusted to a specialist firm, but in due course, with Swami Swarupananda and myself in a coupé, the ladies of the party including my wife, as well as the two craftsmen responsible for the image in a sleeper, and the crates in the luggage van, the Amritsar Mail steamed out of Howrah on Friday, January 7th.

We were met at Varanasi Station the next morning by Swami Paramananda himself, who supervised the loading of sacrificial *yajña* fires and *akhaṇḍa jyoti* from Varanasi Ashram into our coupè in charge of a Brahmachari. This had all been planned in advance, but we did not plan to arrive at Lucknow more than three hours behind schedule, so that it was 10-30 P. M. by the time the van carrying the Puran Purush crates, our luggage, unloading workmen, Ḍasuda (who had met us at Lucknow) and myself reached Naimisharanya Ashram gates on January 8th.

But Mataji had been up expecting us for hours, and the blowing of conch shells from the hall entrance welcomed the arrival of the future presiding deity into His Ashram abode.

The next morning Mataji was up early, supervising the unloading and opening of the crates. She personally superintended the operations of carefully fitting the pieces together, and of placing the image temporarily on a pedestal to the east of the old temple housing the sacred books. Thereafter She Herself first performed the full rituals of *varan* (i. e. ritualistic welcome) as is done on the 6th day of

Navaratri before the Goddess Durga, and then instructed three other senior Ashram Brahmacharinis to perform the same rituals, including *ārati*, before the image. Subsequently She asked all of us, including the Sadhus of the Ashram, to bow down in *praṇāma* before the deity, who looked simply splendid, shining in his new surroundings.

Thereafter She had the image wrapped carefully in layers of fine new white cloth, surmounted by new blue tapestry cloth, the whole encased in a strong rope net barrier, to prevent possible damage during the waiting period upto May next.

The reason became apparent on the 10th and 11th January, the days of *amāvasya*, when lakhs of pilgrims thronged into Naimisharanya village, of which a considerable portion found time to visit our Puran Mandir to see the Puran Purush—even though swathed in bandages !

Mataji's frequent visits of late to the Naimisharanya Ashram have encompassed the place with a halo of holiness.

While the Ashram was in the process of being developed, Mataji often moved for quiet and rest into one of the *five kuthias* existing right on the banks of the Gomati below Hanuman Tila, belonging to Her close devotee and Naimisharanya host, Sri Prayag Narain Saigal. During one of Her brief stays there, two miracles had taken place in connection with trees adjoining Her hut.

The first concerned an *amlakhi*-tree, which had possibly been struck in the distant past by lightning, and all that remained was a five feet high withered and rotten stump. Immediately after Mataji's visit a new green sprout appeared to grow out of the top of the stump, and this has now blossomed out into a huge new *amlakhi*-tree, bearing flowers and fruits although the original withered stump remains unchanged as a mute testimony to the miracle. (vide the story of the hollow bakul-tree at Puri where Haridas, the saint, lived and died in the sixteenth century, in the presence of Mahaprabhu Sri Krishna Chaitanya).

The second miracle concerns a neem-tree adjacent to which Mataji's temporary bathroom was erected during Her stay. And now in Mataji's own words :

"Pitaji, one night as I was lying in the hut, I saw two *murtis* come down from the neem-tree and bend low, as if to have a drink. The next morning the neem-tree fell down for no apparent reason, but you can go and see the remains above ground even today, to testify that there was once a tree there."

Who can tell who were the imprisoned souls that were liberated by the holy touch of Mataji's presence that day, more or less as the child Sri Krishna liberated the twin Jamal-Arjuna trees in Vrindaban in *Dwapara Yuga* ?

During this visit Mataji, in a lavish mood of benediction, continued to bestow Her boundless Grace on all who asked for it.

Someone wanted to play the mridangam in Her presence, so as to be blessed by Her in this ambition, and promptly She created such a situation that at the frequent kirtans that followed, somehow there would be nobody else present to accompany the singing except the person concerned, although there were other more accomplished players in residence among the ashramites. The highlight took place on the 14th morning, when Mataji sang Her favourite hymn "Hey Bhagavan" to celebrate the first *yajña* in the newly inaugurated *yajña-shala* in front of a large congregation, and when the devote in question was privileged to accompany Her on the mridanga for the first time in his life.

A devotee wished to have *darśana* of renowned sages, and take part in intimate satsang with them, So, while he was walking along the heights of Hanuman Tila on tht 10th of Jan, he espied a venerable and resplendent saint in saffron, surrounded by his disciples, giving a fascinating discourse on Sri Rama and singing Sri Rama's name in great veneration, on the banks of the Gomati. This Mahatma was none other than Swami Sri Sri Shivadeva Ashram of Varanasi, passing through Naimisharanya for a day or two over *amāvasya.* The Mahatma was gracious enough to think nothing of breaking off his discourse to give ten minutes of wise counsel to the devotee in question in answer to the latter's unspoken queries.

The same devotee later had a similar experience while visiting Swami Sri Naradananda Saraswati, the long standing and welk-known saint of the Gurukul Vidyalaya in Naimisharanya, who has now handed over charge to his able successor Swami Vivekananda, and who has lived for over 40 years in a grass hut inside his 100 bigha Ashram, exactly like the Rishis of old, while his subordinates have to occupy pucca buildings.

Both Swami Naradananda and Swami Vivekananda visited our Ashram subsequently at Mataji's invitation, on

Jan, 14th and gave very interesting talks, the former on Shankara's Vedanta, and the latter on Tulsidasa's Rāmāyana.

When the devotee in question went to perform his obeisance at the feet of Swami Naradananda on arrival at the Ashram, the Mahatma, with a wonderfully sweet smile, placed around the devotee's neck the garland he had just received from Mataji.

The two master craftsmen, father and son, from Calcutta, primarily responsible for casting the image of Puran Purush, were amply rewarded by Mataji's *darśana* and wise counsel and enjoyed a free trip to Lucknow for a day or two on the way back home on request.

A devotee wished to spend an appreciable time in solitude doing japa under the famous peepul-tree in Vyas Gaddi under which past sages of Naimisharanya are said to have delivered their learned discourses. In spite of the heavy influx of visitors over *amāvasyā*, his wishes were amply fulfiled to his heart's content.

Another devotee arrived in the evening of Jan. 14th without notice, out of the blue, straight from London, by pure chance. He had no difficulty in finding accommodation in the *dharmasālā* for his family and himself, and was duly initiated by Mataji on the 15th morning before departing for Dehradun.

Yet another devotee, a heavily engaged businessman, had arrived by air without adequate bedding etc. in the intense cold, and Mataji arranged his room in the *dharmśālā* next to ours, and provided him and his wife with Her own spare bedding which She conjured up from somewhere within the Ashram premises at a moment's notice.

The same devotee wished to perform his own private *yajña* on the 14th during the time the new *yajña shala* was being inaugrated with *vastu homa* and *Savitri yajña*. His wife had also had a prior dream, and wished to offer special pūjā to the seven Rishis (Saptarshis) of the Yugą on the same day. Both their wishes were completely fulfilled by the Grace of Mataji.

A devotee had an intense desire to be present in front of Mataji inside the yajña-shala at the sacred moment of *purnāhuti* (the final *havan*), but he found himself mixed up with the multitudinous throng that had gathered outside the *Yajña-shala* during satsang with Swami Vivekananda. Soon after, Mataji suddenly entered the *Yajña-shala*, and the main doors closed behind Her.

The devotee in question prayed silently for succour, and immediately Mataji personally opened the small closed side-gate near which the devotee was quietly standing outside, and She at once sped away like lighting to Her legitimate place in front of the sacrificial fire. It was then a simple operation for the devotee to slip inside, lock the side-gate behind him, and enjoy the holy moment of *purṇāhuti* in peace in the presence of Mataji, exactly as he had longed for all that morning.

Another strong and active devotee wished to perform manual labour by filling the lower levels of the compound with earth and by felling and clearing unwanted trees from the lower levels of the Ashram garden, with his gang of labourers and a lorry. Mataji let him have this pleasure to his heart's content throughout Her stay.

Yet another devotee, living in Lucknow, had been unable to find suitable transport to, and accommodation in Naimisharanya to meet his requirements, but the Governor himself offered to bring him and his wife to Mataji in his car, and invited them to stay as his guests in the dak bungalow at Naimisharanya. At the conclusion of Mataji's stay, he also transported them back to Lucknow.

Finally His Excellency, the Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Dr. Chinna Reddy, wished to celebrate his birthday on Jan. 13th, in Mataji's presence. So he arrived at Naimisharanya on the 12th evening and left on the 15th morning, having had continuous *darśana* of Mataji throughout his stay, and having enjoyed the frequent kirtans performed by the Ashram girls at Mataji's request, since he was known to be exceptionally fond of devotional music.

One evening, during satsang with Mataji in the Governor's presence, Mataji turned round and said to His Excellency, "Pitaji, all classes of people come to visit this body, some may be Governors, like you, others my be senior executives of big companies (pointing to a devotee) and yet others may be busy businessmen (looking towards another devotee), and so on."

The Governor may have wished to let Mataji use his car as often as possible. So, much to our astonishment and to the consternation of those senior Ashramites whose duty it is to guard Her person zealously, She decided to go to Lucknow Station in the evening of the 15th of January from the house of Sri Rameshwar Sahai all by Herself, solely with the Governor and his A. D. C.s, unaccompanied by any Brahmacharis or Brahmacharinis.

In this context, a fascinating facet of Mataji's unusual and all-embracing activities cannot be omitted.

On the morning of January 15th, at our Ashram, after having undergone all the previous heavy programme, and after initiating that very morning between 7-30 and 9 A.M. at least three people to my knowledge inside the Puran Mandir, She spent two solid hours between 9 A. M. and 11 A. M. sitting on an unkempt seat in an unswept kitchen, sorting out with Brahmacharini Ganga the stores that would be required by Ashram inmates remaining behind after Her departure for the next few months.

When devotees are engaged wholeheartedly in the service of Mataji, it is well-known that minor miracles take place almost continually, whenever hitches of any sort are encountered.

We were a large party, and our bookings from Calcutta had been finalised well in advance through a specialist agency. But we were worried about our return rail bookings, particularly as three extra Ashramites, Visuddha, Pushpa and Pushpa's uncle were told to accompany us.

Here the Sahais of Lucknow proved to be a tower of strength, and did all that was necessary and even more. But as our return rail bookings could only be made some time after our arrival, I was anxious to send word to my son at home about a definite date on which to meet us at Howrah with transport. Miraculously, a very kind P. W. D. official visiting the site opposite our Ashram one morning soon after our arrival, offered to send a telegram on my behalf to Calcutta from Lucknow, after verifying fromthe Sahais the exact date of our booking.

The most difficult part of the return journey was getting out of Naimisharanya. All our immature plans for the morning of Jan. 15th went astray, but no sooner had we finished our midday meal at the Ashram, than a second taxi, over and above Panuda's requirements, suddenly turned up from nowhere, seemingly predestined to take our party together with all our luggage to Sitapur, from where we easily managed to get seats in a luxury bus to Lucknow.

However, I was still anxious about our heavy transport arrangements to Lucknow Station on the morning of January 16th, but thanks to Mataji's grace, an old colleague whom I had not met since retiring ten years ago, and who had—unknown to me—settled down in Lucknow, turned up at the Sahais' residence on the 15th evening to greet Mataji. I was overjoyed to see him, and he was mainly instrumental in transporting all our heavy luggage to the station on the 16th, in addition to driving us there in his car. But for his help, I could not have loaded all that huge amount of luggage into our sleeper, or found our alloted seats, or settled down comfortably, within the comparatively short space of time the down Amritsar Mail stops at Lucknow.

Meanwhile the Varanasi Ashram knew we were travelling on the 6 down train through Varanasi Station on the 16th evening, but they could not be informed in time that Pushpa was with us, destined to get down at Varanasi, and

I was reluctant to leave her alone on the platform without any escort. But luckily, through Mataji's *kheyāla,* a friend from Varanasi had taken the trouble of ascertaining from the Ashram the exact date and hour of our passing through, and met us at the Station, so that it was simple to arrange for him to escort Pushpa to the Ashram on his way home.

Finally, as far as our Naimisharanya Ashram is concerned, all eyes are looking forward to the week from 9th to 16th of May, 1975, during which Puran Purushji is going to be installed in the beautiful new temple already completed to the north of the Puran Mandir.

It will be difficult for Calcutta devotees, preparing feverishly for Mataji's Birthday Celebrations at Agarpara, to be present at Naimisharanya immediately before. But let us see what Puran Purushji and Mataji hold in store for us, for it is only by their special grace that we are destined to witness any of these special ceremonies, anywhere, at any time.

Jai Puran Purushji

Jai Ma

Pujya Swami Sharananandaji

M.M.V.

I have been asked to write an article about Sri Swami Sharananandaji, who has departed from our midst on December 25th last. As the Editor wrote in the January issue of *Ānanda Vārtā,* for an egoless being of his stature it makes no difference whether he is in the body or not, but for us his departure is a very heavy loss.

Very little is known of the early life of Swamiji, except that he had lost his eyesight at the age of 11 or 12; so that he was not at all 'learned'. He attained enlightenment by sheer depth of his thought and discrimination (*viveka.*) Further, he is known to have practised a good deal of *tapasya* in his adolescence, mostly on the banks of the Ganges, including Uttarakhanda.

He was a most loving and compassionate Mahatma, ever intent on mitigating the suffering of all who approached him, never sparing himself. Who will not share the hope that the seeds of light and love he has sown over so many years will grow and go on bearing fruit for evermore ?

The above is but too true. Even after his first heart attack as long back as in 1959, when doctors advised him to take rest, he continued to give his discourses and to travel about as before, paying no heed to the body. And during his last prolonged illness, in spite of the intense suffering caused thereby, he was constantly thinking of others. He preached all his life that the highest content of a man's life was that the body be spent in the service of the world, the 'I' be egoless, and the heart be saturated with love. This was visible during his own last days. Due to repeated heart attacks in quick succession, doctors prohibited him to meet people, to speak to those collecting from far and near to see him. But Swamiji's injunction was not to prevent anyone from coming to see him or to solicit his advice regarding *sādhana.* The body is to go, he observed, let it be spent for the benefit of others.

Below are culled some of his utterances over those days of heart attack and suffering :—

"I am not the body.

"With the shedding of the body, I will live in peace and bliss, being free from the limitations of the body.

"There will be no *condolence* meetings on my leaving the body. Instead, there will be *satsang* gatherings.

"No token will be kept of my body, and no statue (*samādhi*) will be erected over my remains.

"Whoever loves me, will love God, for the love of God is my life.

"Whoever wishes to serve me, will serve the *Manav Seva Sangh*: a symbol of *seva, tyāga* and *prema* (service, renunuciation and love).

"There is nothing but God—nothing, nothing."

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A good number of books have been published by the Manav Seva Sangh, Vrindaban, consisting of the Swami's teachings. A common feature of them all is that by the transparent sincerity and compelling simplicity of his dissertation he makes the most abstruse spiritual verities intelligible to the unsophisticated rational mind. Acknowledging the book *Sant Samāgam* (first Hindi collection of Swamiji's teachings), Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the then President of India, observed : "I have had the privilege of meeting Swamiji on one or two occasions, and I was very deeply impressed by the way in which he dealt with the most complicated problems in a simple, intelligible way."

He probes into the three natural propensities of man—doing, feeling and thinking—and shows how these have only to be carried to their logical conclusion to be transformed into the truest action, love and knowledge—*karma*, *bhakti* and *jñāna* respectively—ultimately fusing into one. The crisis of man—individual as well as social—he declared, can only be solved by his realising his spiritual potential and his true aim of life, which would spontaneously result in non-injury, non-appropriation, desirelessness, freedom from fear, selfless service and love of God.

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Let me conclude with some characteristic aphorisms of the Swami relating to *sādhana* in general from his teachings during the past many years :

"Renunciation of wrong action spontaneously leads to right action.

"Do to others as you should like others to do to you. Do not do to others what you should not like others to do to you.

"In the renunciation of one's rights and the protection of the rights of others lies the essence of *dharma.*

"One who desires nothing for himself is desired by all. A fundamental test of one's progress on the spiritual path is the measure of one's desirelessness.

"Exercising the mind on what others should do makes us forget what we should do.

"Right use of things consists in utilising them in the service of others.

"All wealth and power is a trust of the poor and the weak.

"The feeling of compassion is the root of service.

"Forget your virtues and others' vices.

"Not to repeat an evil is the best atonement.

"In the renunciation of *a-sādhana* is the emergence of *sādhana.*

"All impurities of the mind are rooted in the craving for pleasures of the senses.

"It is impossible to be detached from the world while one is attached to one's body.

"To imbibe the lesson of sorrow—which is *tyāga*—is the greatest *tapa.*

"Above pain and pleasure is life. Pain and pleasure do not constitute life; they are but tools of *sādhana.*

"Love is the nature of the Beloved and the life of the lover. Love is light, life and eternity. There is nothing else to achieve but love, in love consists the perfection of life.

"In the ending of desire is the dawn of Love.

"Let the devotee who begs God for favours beg for the Bestower of favours Himself, so that he will not have to beg again and again.

"The last offering on the altar of love is the surrender of 'I' and 'mine'. With the disintegrating of the atom of 'I' the sādhaka becomes one with yoga, *jñāna* and love,

"Inherent in one's own reform is the reform of all.

"Actions, beliefs and relationships opposed to discrimination (*viveka*) are to be rejected.

"The right use of sorrow is renunciation; the right use of happiness is sharing it with others.

"By adopting any one *sādhana* in its fulness, all *sādhanas* are carried out of themselves.

"Men generally consider *sādhana* as part of their life. The thoughtful aspirant, however, treats life itself as *sādhana*.

"The discharge of every *pravritti* for the good of all is the path of action.

"To detach oneself from all objects, circumstances and states of mind through discrimination (*viveka*) is the path of thought.

"Faith in the Lord and surrender to Him is the path of devotion.

"*Bhajan*—Not to rest in peace without realizing God is true *bhajan.*

"*Dharma—Dharma* is the captain of the soul in *pravritti.* It leads one by righteous *pravritti* to *nivritti.*

"We are but actors on the stage. Acting the part allotted to him is not the true being of man. Acting is only a game we are playing. One has only to step out of the stage to realize his true being.

"Suffering borne willingly and cheerfully without resentment is transformed into *tapa.*

"Even as the body takes food and water, so is *satsang* the food of the soul.

"*Mook satsang*—Silent Communion with Truth—is the hidden base as well as the hidden apex of all *sādhanas.* The Voice of the Silence can only be heard in true *mouna—mook satsang.*"

* * *

"In God is eyeryone and everything. Where is God not? This is why Ma is also ever near though the body does not go everywhere."

—*Mata Anandamayi*

Holy Reminiscences

Jainath Kaul, M.Sc.

4. Mother's Birthday Celebrations, 1958.

(Continued from the last issue)

Soon after the 'Darshan of Grace', Ma's birthday celebrations began at the newly acquired Ashram at Agarpara. Now, I was in Calcutta on official duty to relieve Sri S. R. Sen, the officer-in-charge of the Calcutta Branch Office of the Indian Standards Institution (ISI), who had suddenly fallen ill. Since the Branch Office was near Esplanade, not very far from Ballygunge where Ma had been staying prior to the celebrations, I was able to go there for Ma's darshan and satsang in the evening after office hours. But Agarpara was a long way off, and if Ma had not wrought another miracle, it would have been impossible for me to participate fully in the birthday function.

Participation with Ma's Grace.

Since it was Ma's kheyal* which had brought me to Calcutta, I could not be deprived of such participation. But for that I had to live at Agarpara, which, in turn, could be possible only if Sri Sen were to relieve me of official work immediately and that was exactly what happened. He became fit enough to resume duty just in time for me to hand over charge and shift to Agarpara Ashram on Friday, May 2nd, 1958 the very day on which the celebrations began. But that was not all. Since ISI works for 5 days in a week, the following two days, being Saturday and Sunday were available to me without leave. Further, the leave rules of Central Government by which ISI is governed, permit that officers on tour can take casual leave up to one week before returning to headquarters. And since the celebrations were to end on Friday, the 9th May, before the week would be over, I was able to participate fully in the auspicious function for all the eight days and still go back to the headquarters at Delhi, performing the return journey as part of the official tour with all its concomitant privileges.

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* See Ānanda Vārtā : Holy Reminiscences, Vol. 22, No. 2

Ma tears Flower, Petal by Petal.

The celebrations went off as brightly as ever, with the usual *kirtan*, *bhajans* and discourses by leading *Mahātmās*, feasting and the life-giving Matri *Satsang* (question-answer hour with Ma). Then, after a couple of days, one morning, as I was seated in the front row along with other devotees in the *pandal* (large tent) I found Ma removing slowly but steadily one petal after another from a flower in Her hand. She did this till all the petals had been removed and the bare stalk remained. But what was remarkable about this incident was that my attention was so pin-pointedly drawn to what She was doing that it made a permanent impression on my mind. Although I did feel at that time that this small *līlā* (divine play) must definitely have some significance, I yet failed to appreciate it then. However, when later on, I read the following passage in Bhaiji's book* everything became clear.

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* See 'Mother as Revealed to Me', Chapter : To Distant Lands

"One day Mother took a flower in the Ashram and was tearing away all the petals thereof. She said to me 'Many of your *saṁskāras* have dropped away and many more will fall away like the petals of this flower till I shall remain as your main prop, just like the only stalk of this flower; do you understand ?' Saying this She began to laugh. I enquired 'Ma, how can I reach that state ?' She replied, "Every day try to live with this idea, you need not do anything else."

Later, towards the end of the celebrations, on the day previous to the one on which *Kumārī Pūjā* was held and after a long session of *Kirtan*, Ma distributed *prasāda* with Her own hands to a large number of devotees near the *pandal*. It was a wonderful sight—the divine motherliness in action, revealed through the description-defying tenderness in Ma's eyes and lips and the loving grace which accompanied the *prasāda* as it was further sanctified by Mother's holy touch. After receiving my share, I had stood near by, watching the divine *līlā* with a heart full of deep gratitude for the privilege of its darshan. When the distribution was over, someone quickly brought a jug of water and Ma washed Her hands. But in the hurry, the towel was missing and I was seized with a strong desire to wipe Ma's wet hands with my handkerchief. But this could not be done as my handkerchief that day was not an unused one. However, as this thought crossed my mind, a lady devotee standing by availed herself of the golden opportunity and purified her sari by using it as a towel for Ma.

Ma fulfils My Wish

The next day was *Kumārī Pujā*. After the function was over, Ma came out and repeated the *līlā* of the previous day, though in another part of the Ashram, namely, the open sloping ground at the back, facing the Ganges. And, after the *prasāda* had been distributed and Ma had washed Her hands, there was again no towel around. This time also I was nearby and, in addition, had a handkerchief that could be offered to Ma. Overjoyed at the situation, I lost no time in taking Ma's supremely blessed hands in my own and wiping them dry. Mother, too, not only permitted me to do this, but even significantly left Her hands freely in mine, as if telling me graciously thereby "Well, you wanted this, so fulfil your wish to your heart's content." In this connection, I recall an assignment which Ma had once given to brother S. N. Sopory of Bombay, an old and very valued devotee of Ma. Once, on having darshan of Ma's lotus feet in Her room, Sri Sopory had a strong desire to touch them. And soon enough, the *Karunamayī* (Compassionate one) graciously asked him to feel Her feet to find out if there was a thorn in them anywhere !

While wiping Ma's hands, I had noticed that they were practically boneless and as soft as butter. Years later, I heard from the lips of revered Rehana Tyabji, the famous Krishna bhakta and author of the celebrated booklet 'The Heart of a Gopi', that Ma's body is very different and not a mere combination of *guṇas* (the three attributes of matter) like ours.

Ma's Body and the Universe

Regarding Ma's body, it will be relevant to quote from

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* See Ananda Varta Vol. 18, No. 1, P. 27

Sri Ganga Charan Das Gupta's article which appeared in Ānanda Vārtā four years ago.

"On 3rd August, 1944, the *Jhulan Purnima* was celebrated at Navadvip. On receiving the news that Ma was very unwell, Sri Das Gupta had gone there to see Her. But entering Her room at 11 p. m. on that night, he had found "Mother seated smiling, beaming with joy. Her whole body shone like a ball of dazzling light, making the electric bulb look almost pale and red. Such wonderful radiance from a human figure was beyond all our conceptions. Her body shone with such an intensely soothing light that the whole room appeared to be filled with some divine ethereal presence." When subsequently asked as to what made Her body look so bright that night in spite of Her serious physical illness, Mother had said with Her characteristic smile: "Didn't you see how the many gods and goddesses in the temple of Navadvip were nicely dressed and illumined for the *Jhulan Pūrnimā* celebrations ? Don't you think it proper that this body, too, should put forth some lustre and grace."

Further, in the same article, Sri Das Gupta has recorded Mother's own highly significant words about Her body while answering questions as follows :

Question : People say you are Mother. Where are your sons and daughters ?

Mataji : Here (pointing to Her breast).

Question : Where is your husband ?

Mataji : Here (with the same gesture).

Question : Where are your parents ?

Mataji : (With a smile) Here, within this heart.

Question : Your home ?

Mataji : (With the same gesture) Here.

The lady who was putting these questions looked completely puzzled, failing to comprehend what Mother had said. Mother noticed it and in Her usual soothing, convincing manner said, "Here in this body lie all things in the universe—father, mother, son and daugher—all created beings. From this One, all have come into being. In the One all exist, all persist and finally merge."

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The Beyond

J. N. Dhamija

Drop is the Ocean
Moment Eternity
Thy Grace abounds
For all to seek, to know and feel.
Ageless, Eternal
All pervading Life;
Countless aeons past—
Countless aeons to come—
O Spirit Supreme,
Be Thou with me;
Transform, transcending Heavens,
Thy spark a blaze of glory,
The Moment becoming Eternity.

———

Mātri Līla

(April 15th—July 15th, 1975.)

Mataji reached Naimisharanya from Kankhal on April 17th. Followed a period of feverish activity for all present in preparation of the consecration of the Purān Pūrūsh Mandir and the Bhagavata Saptah to be held from 9th to 16th May. Mataji, as usual, directed and supervised everything to the minutest detail and so, needless to say, the functions proceeded with a splendour and magnitude difficult to express in words. Naimisharanya, this most sacred place, which is supposed to remain untouched by the Kali Yuga, where thousands of Rishis are said to have lived and practised austerities, where all the Purānas have been composed, and which no doubt was a centre of great culture and profound learning in ancient times, seems to have been practically asleep for the last so many years. Almost untouched by modern civilization, even the most primitive commodities have to be procured from outside. Yet, everybody had been invited by Mataji Herself and by printed invitations to participate in the festivities. Several hundreds flocked from far and near: among them great mahātmās, some prominent well-known personalities, high Government officials headed by the Governor of the U. P., Dr. Chenna Reddy and his wife, Rajas and Ranis of various states. Even the Maharaja of Travancore, who had never before visited the North, graced the occasion together with his brother, the Elaya Raja. Five American devotees were also present throughout. Unable to understand a single word of the discourses that were all in Hindi, they were happy to be able to meditate in Ma's presence in that holy atmosphere and to join the Kirtans.

Notwithstanding the gruelling heat of May, with hot winds blowing mercilessly, everyone was in high spirits and all guests were accommodated as near and as comfortably as possible and were fed sumptuously day after day, including the band and the police force. Enormous tanks had been built in our Ashram that supplied water in great abundance throughout the twenty-four hours, a necessity in the hot season. In front of a solid structure of bricks and cement with a pucca roof to seat Mataji and the Mahātmas on a raised dais, and an adjoining room where the Sanskrit Bhagavata was recited by pandits, a spacious pandal had been erected, equipped with tube-lights, fans and loudspeakers. The daily satsang started at 7·30 a. m. and continued till about midday, then again from 4·30 p. m. till 8 or 9 p. m., with kirtan in the interval. Pandit Srinath Shastri gave a very lucid exposition of the Bhagavata until 10·30 a.m. and from 4·30 to 6 p.m. This was followed both times by most interesting talks of Sri Swami Akhandananda Saraswati on the Purānas. He pointed out that while the Vedas laid down the main principles, the Purānas elaborated on the details that could be applied in all conditions and circumstances of life by every type of human temperament. Together with the Mahantji of Nirvani Akhara, Kankhal, Mahamandaleshwara Swami Prakashanandaji was present throughout the function and used to give one or two very fine discourses daily. Then Mahamandaleshwara Swami Vidyananda, Sri Swami Vishnuashram of Suktal, Sri Swami Govind Prakash of Ramathirta Ashram came for shorter spells, contributing to the success of the festival by their presence and their spirited lectures. Mataji came daily for some time during the Bhagavata and as a rule attended all the talks of the Mahātmās.

On May 11th was celebrated the completion of Purashcharan of Gayatri Mantra of Brahmacharini Udas, which she had started in Mataji's presence on January 14th, 1973. Over and above the daily satsang, *Nāma Yajña* of Mahamantra was performed for 24 hours under canvas round a tree near the *Yajña-shala*, at a fair distance from the pandal. Some devotees from Delhi with others kept up the kirtan on the 10th evening and all next day, while the students of the Jullundur Girls' School run in Ma's name, and some devotees from Hathras, assisted by a few other ladies, sang all night. Mataji was of course present for the beginning and the completion of the kirtana at sunset. Later a special *ārati* was performed with one thousand lights, placed in tiny earthen vessels. Everyone present was given a light and participated actively in the worship. Then *prasāda* was distributed.

May 14th, *Akshaya Tritiya*, was the auspicious day chosen for the consecration of Purān Purush Mandir. Preliminary ceremonies had already been performed on the preceding two days. In the morning of the 14th, very elaborate *abhisheka* of the statue of Purān Purush took place in the open. Then the *vigraha* was carried in solemn procession round Naimisharanya for about an hour to the accompaniment of uninterrupted kirtana, halting specially at the famous "*Vyāsagaddi*" where the sage *Vyāsa* is said to have written all the Purānas. A fleet of cars and jeeps followed the deity, Mataji and Swami Akhandanandaji and other Mahatmas occupying the first cars. The bulk of devotees followed on foot, their heads covered with bright yellow handkerchiefs which Ma had distributed to all present together with a picture of Purān Purush and a booklet in Hindi and Sanskrit, entitled '*Purān Swarūp*." After the procession Sri Purān Purush was installed with great ceremony in his exquisitely beautiful little temple, adjoining the one in which the Purānas are kept. At night *ārati* with 125,000 lights was performed from the veranda. The lights were kept in five large earthen vessels, each containing five bundles of five thousand thread-like wicks. Later they were placed outside, in front of the mandir, and Mataji asked everyone to circumambulate round them and "take *ārati*" while She sat on an elevated seat, watching. The lights soared up high in blazing flames, burning for a long time—a really inspiring sight.

It seems appropriate to say here a few words about the history of the Purān Purush Mandir. The father of Mahamahopadhyaya Sri Rajeshwar Shastri of Varanasi, one of the most learned men of our time, possessed a picture of Purān Purush which he used to worship daily. It was there that Sri Swami Akhandananda Saraswati saw the picture and later published it in his magazine "Chintamani." When he held a *Bhagavata Paksha* in Naimisharanya in 1968, he saw our Purān Mandir that had been established a year earlier. He then suggested to Mataji to instal a *vigraha* of Purān Purush. Mataji at once took up the idea and so the temple was built.

The pictures of Purān Purush that were distributed do not give even a faint idea of the beauty and power of the *vigraha*, which is extraordinarily alive and impressive, completely unique and different from the deities in other Hindu temples. No other mandir of Purān Purush exists anywhere in the world. Sri Purān Purush, as far as we understand, is the presiding deity, the spirit of the Purānas. A very great scholar* has defined the word "*vigraha*" as "Concrete External Presence as Form." He then explains: "An image consecrated through mantras or through the devotion and adoration of the worshipper becomes the Deity Itself." All over the globe, not only the new generation but also a minority of men and women of all age-groups are growing ever more weary of materialism and are eagerly searching for deeper values that will give significance to their empty lives. Who can tell whether this bringing down of the Concrete External Presence of Purān Purush—the Spirit of the Purānas—is not symbolic of the beginning of a new era in which the ancient wisdom of the Rishis may be resuscitated and made available not only to scholars but to the Indian people as a whole and to all humanity, so as to become a living force that will mould and transform human lives ?

On May 16th morning the Bhagavata Saptah was completed and the Scripture carried in procession to its permanent abode in the Purān Mandir. The birthday of the great Adiguru Shankaracharya happened to fall on that day. A large, decorated picture of the Adiguru with offerings of flowers and fruits was put up in the raised place of the Bhagavata and several mahātmās delivered short but inspiring speeches on Sri Sankaracharya, his life and teaching. This marked a very beautiful and significant ending of a unique function that will go on living in the memory of all who were present.

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* Mahamahopadyaya Dr. Gopinath Kaviraj. See Glossary of "Words of Sri Anandamayi Ma", p. 221.

On the 18th morning a party from Sitapur for a few hours recited the Ramayana in the Ashram hall and Mataji was present throughout. The same party had already performed on May 3rd, the actual beginning of Mataji's birthday celebrations, when Puja was performed in the night. On the 19th morning Mataji motored to Hardoi where She boarded the Punjab Mail for Calcutta. Two large parties had already left for the same destination on the 17th and 18th.

Mataji alighted in our Ashram at Agarpara on May 20th. Braced by the singular success of their function at Jodhpur Park in Mataji's presence in February 1974*, the devotees of Calcutta full of enthusiasm took it upon themselves to arrange an even more gigantic festival in our Ashram at Agarpara, where Mataji's birthday was celebrated from May 22nd to 30th. Mataji completed Her 79th year entering Her 80th. For this auspicious occasion a Souvenir was produced, the best and most voluminous we have had so far. It contains five very beautiful, large photos, 132 pages of articles by devotees, and excerpts from Mataji's teaching, 86 pages in Bengali and 46 in English.

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* See A. V. Vol. 21/2, p. 136 & Vol. 21/3, pp. 188–208.

In front of the guesthouse of the Ashram a pandal of truly enormous size, seating several thousands, had been erected and decorated with ingenuity, thoughtfulness and taste. Satsang was held there from early morning till late at night: Rāsalilā enacted by Har Govind's party of Vrindaban, followed by brilliant discourses in Bengali and Hindi by mahātmās and scholars such as Sri Swami Vishnuashram of Suktal, Mahamandaleshwara Swami Prakashananda, Sri Narayan Goswami who talked on the Bhagavata, Sri Jogesh Brahmachari, Prof. Tripurari Chakravarti, Prof. Roma Choudhury and others. The afternoon lecture was followed every evening by exquisite music by the most famous artists of Bengal, including Baul singers. The tightly packed congregation listened spell-bound to their wonderful songs. One evening the Ramayana was enacted very artistically by the well-known C.L. T., an organization for children who specialize in this. Another evening there was a high class performance of the lila of Sri Rama Krishna Paramhansa. Then the climax of each day: "Matri Satsang" when Mataji replied to questions or sang. Mataji gave *darśana* for hours daily during the satsang.

One night at about 10 p. m., when most of the crowd had left, Mataji began to sing and went on for hours, one kirtana after another. Mataji remained in the pandal until 2 a. m. She never went upstairs to Her room that night but lay down on the dais for some time. The kirtana was taken up by Brahmachari Tanmayananda and later transferred to the hall where the chanting of the Mahamantra continued day and night until the end of the celebrations

A Vishnu Yaj a performed by pandits in the Yajnashala near the Ashram temples was another item of the festival. One day 108 kumārīs were worshipped and entertained to a feast in the Ashram hall.

On May 27th, a remarkable incident took place. The relative of a bhakta came for Ma's *darśana* for the first time in his life. Mataji was in Her room. He somehow managed to reach Mataji's terrace upstairs and was waiting with others for Mataji to emerge. When She passed from one room to another, he caught a glimpse of Ma and Her glance also fell on him. He fell down as if unconscious. Ma was informed and came outside at once and attended to the lucky man who breathed his last in this auspicious manner in Ma's presence, the day before Her birthday *Tithi.* As was found out later he had already had two heart attacks and this may possibly have been his third one. A few days later, before Mataji left for Assam, She visited his bereaved family.

At about 3 a. m. on the 29th, Mataji was taken to the pandal by Mahant Sri Girdhari Narayan Puri of the Nirvani Akhara at Kankhal, and Tithi Puja was performed in great style to the accompaniment of the sweet songs of Chhabi Banerji and Pushpa. After the Puja everyone queued up to do *praṇāma* to Ma who was lying deeply absorbed in *samādhi.* The same evening *adhivāsa* of Namayajña of Mahamantra started and Mataji came at night when the women took over. The kirtan was completed on the 30th after sunset.

On the 31st morning Mataji and Her large party bid good-bye to the Ashram and proceeded first of all to Kashipur, a village near Calcutta where Mataji stayed for a few hours in the garden-house of devotees who had built a Matri Mandir in their grounds. From there Ma went to New Alipore and spent three nights in the home of Sri Makhan Ghosh, a family of bhaktas of many years' standing. A room on the 4th floor is permanently reserved for Mataji's exclusive use. The roof had been covered with canvas and very large crowds collected for Ma's *darśana* morning and evening. After leaving Alipore on June 3rd, accompanied by Her entire retinue who followed Her everywhere in a number of cars, Mataji halted at several houses of devotees. At midday She was offered *bhoga* in Chhabi Banerji's shrine-room where She spent a few hours. From there She proceeded to Sri Gopal Mitra's residence, called *Vaikuntha Dhāma*, on the 12th storey of a sky-scraper. Mataji and everyone else ascended by lift. Sri Gopal Mitra, a disciple of Sri Thakur Sitaram Das Omkarnath, had invited his Guru together with Mataji. He also stayed overnight and both He and Ma were present in the large hall adjoining Ma's room, while satsang was held. Mataji talked and sang. On June 4th evening Mataji graced the house of Sri Amal Chatterji. There also a large pandal had been provided and Mataji replied to questions and sang. On June 5th, She left for Govindpur where She remained for one night in the gardenhouse of Sri Pratibha Kumar Kundu, Here comparatively fewer people assembled and Mataji could walk about at leisure in the beautiful garden. On June 6th, on Her way to Bhasagram on the Diamond

Harbour Rd, Mataji visited the house of Sri Mahabir Sen, a disciple of late Brahmajna Ma. At Bhasagram Mataji spent four nights in the gardenhouse of Sri Bibhuti Chakravarti. She had stayed there for the first time last February for a few days. Here also satsang was held in a large pandal, attended by a huge congregation. One day *Nāma Yajña* was performed for twenty-four hours. Another day, Prof. Tripurari Chakravarti delivered a lecture, then again Sri Govind Gopal Mukerji came with his wife and everyone listened to their beautiful songs. Mataji went to see the samādhi of the deer that had died there during Her visit in February.*

The initiative and the devoted labour of the Calcutta devotees for many months in preparation for Mataji's visit has surely had its rich reward. During Mataji's sojourn in the Ashram for eleven-days and Her visits to so many different localities in and near Calcutta for another ten days, thousands and thousands were given the opportunity of Mataji's *darśana* to their heart's content and many were blessed by making closer contact with Her. Countless men, women and children have no doubt benefited greatly and lastingly.

On June 10th, Mataji and Her large party boarded the train to Assam. At Bangaigaon station cars were waiting that took everyone to Gauhati, a distance of 150 miles. Reaching there on the 11th evening, Mataji remained one night in Rama Mandir. Satsang was held in the temple hall. The next morning Mataji and the whole party visited Kamakhya, the famous temple and place of pilgrimage of

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* See A. V., Vol. XXII/2, p. 108–109.

Kamakshi Devi. On June 12th night, everyone went on to Dibrugarh. reaching there on the 13th.

A disciple of Sri Ram Thakur, a famous Bengali Guru, who left his body long ago, had started a small Ashram for Mataji which was inaugurated some time ago by Brahmachari Virajananda since Mataji could not come in person. At Dibrugarh railway station, a great multitude of people received Ma and took Her car in procession round the city for about an hour with kirtan all along. A spectacular number joined the procession. The devotees of Dibrugarh took immense trouble to make the best possible arrangements for Mataji and Her companions. Satsang was observed regularly in a pandal. Hosts of people came daily for Ma's *darśana*, in fact the pandal could not hold them. In spite of the scarcity of space, everything proceeded in great order as the congregation was very well disciplined and obedient and did not trouble Mataji in any way. Mataji was in an excellent mood throughout Her sojourn in Assam. She talked at length and sang in response to requests. One day, Dr. Lalith, the son of the late Shirish a *dharmaputra* (spiritual son) of Didima after She had lost three sons in quick succession, came to see Ma. This reminded Her of olden times and She related many interesting incidents from Her youth. One evening satsang was held in the Kali Bari which contains a vigraha of the goddess Kali of a rare beauty. Another evening Mataji attended satsang at a Marwari organization. In both places Mataji very generously talked and sang. She also visited the Sharda Math of the Ramakrishna Mission as well as several other maths. One day Mataji went for a walk on the bank of the Brahmaputra which is enourmously broad, giving the impression of a sea. A day or two before Mataji left Assam, ***prasāda*** was arranged for one and all. The food (puris, vegetables etc) was put into large leafcups. Everybody lined up in a never ending queue and received his share. The distribution went on for hours and hours. Several thousands partook of the feast.

On June 18th, Mataji motored to Tinsukia from where She caught the train to Bangaigaon. Even at Tinsukia a pandal had been erected, although Mataji could give ***darśanā*** only for about half on hour on Her way to the station. At Bangaigaon the connecting train was nine hours late and Ma spent the whole night on the platform, reaching Varanasi on the 21st morning instead of the 20th night. At Varanasi Mataji had high fever for one day. Fortunately She got much better soon. Ma stayed in Her room above Gopal Mandir and nobody was allowed to disturb Her there. People could have ***darśana*** from the terrace above Annapurna temple across the narrow lane, when Mataji came out on the terrace near Her room. On June 29th Mataji left for Naimisharanya. There She at long last was able to rest and relax after the very strenuous programme of almost two months. From Naimisharanya Mataji proceeded to Kankhal where Gurupurnima was celebrated on July 23rd.

Durga Puja will most likely be performed in Ma's presence at Uttarkashi from October 10th to 14th. The Samyam Mahavrata is to be held at Swadeshi House, Kanpur, at the invitation of the Jaipuria family from 11th to 18th November.

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ॐ मा
मातृ शरण

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Ānanda Vārtā

A quarterly journal dealing mainly with the divine life and teaching of *MATA ANANDAMAYEE* and with other religio-philosophical topics

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Ānanda Vārtā

V. XXII] OCTOBER, 1975 [No. 4

The One who is the Eternal, the Atman,
He Himself is the pilgrim on the path of Immortality,
He is all in all, He alone is.

Mātri Vāni

They are living in a locality where *tapasyā* is practised, in the foot-hills of the Himalayas, in the vicinity of a Siva temple. By the atmosphere of their *sādhana*, their *tayasyā* the place should become so filled with spiritual vibrations that even people coming from outside would be able to notice this distinctly. Ashram life must be made worthy of its name, must be blessed—this is as it should be. Eyes, face, the whole body will then radiate tranquillity, gentleness. All travellers on the supreme Path must be full of devotion, ascetic, the very embodiments of love, great yogins. The pilgrimage is undertaken for the sake of self-forgetfulness, for the revelation of one's true Being, to experience the touch of Him.

* * *

Change your life completely, from its very root. Become a *sādhaka* and go ahead on the spiriual path with splendid vigour and energy. At every single moment He is with you as your helper – keep this in mind. The One to whose service you are devoting your life is Himself the Saviour. In order to experience this deep within, try with all your might to purify yourself. If for a whole year one strictly speaks the truth and adheres to truth scrupulously in every respect, a glimpse of Truth may possibly be caught as a result. Let there be not even a hint or suggestion of falsehood.

* * *

Keep a strict watch over everything you do – how you eat, sleep, move about and sit. Furthermore, the practice one has undertaken in order to be released from bondage must be performed with faith and love. No religious exercise should be done disrespectfully for it is He Himself who has come in the guise of the practice. By affliction He destroys sorrow. The suffering that has to be endured with patience, fortitude and forbearance is the Destroyer of Sorrow Himself who appears in this shape so as to conquer all suffering.

* * *

By chanting the Gayatri mantra, by performing fire sacrifice, by japa, meditation and similar practices one is cleansed and purified from the dross and the karma accumulated during countless former births and in the present. Thereby is aided the unveiled revelation of that blazing, glorious Reality which like a radiant light shines deep within oneself and which is the goal.

* * *

The endeavour to keep the mind constantly engaged in the contemplation of THAT is man's duty as a human being. Do not escape by saying: "I cannot". You will have to develop the capacity for it, you will have to do it. For a human being everything is possible. By God's grace you have been born in a human body as a Brahmin. If someone is knocked down, he surely does not remain lying on the ground. He rises, stands up and walks on again. The speed of one's advance must become swift. For those who are pilgrims it is necessary to forge ahead with great energy, vigour, vivacity and velocity. Do not proceed leisurely sitting comfortably in a hackney carriage.

* * *

In order to annihilate what is undesirable and harmful (*aniṣṭa*), the mind has to be steeped in the adoration of the Beloved (*Iṣṭa*). The notion that He is far away must be altogether given up. Thou art within and without, in every vein and artery, in every leaf and blade of grass, in the world and beyond it. The awakening of the sense of want is to be welcomed, it opens the way. HE is there at every step to make the unfit expert. As the sense of want and emptiness Thou appearest and no other–Thou art ever close by. "Lord I take refuge in Thee, I take refuge in Thee !"

A letter and Mataji's Reply

Mother, are we friends ?
Mother, do you love me ?
Can you reach me here ?
You have said you are near,
So would you please appear ?
Am I too impure ?
Am I not sincere ?"

Mataji's reply :

"God is the supreme Father, Mother, Beloved, Friend, Companion. Of course He is a friend, He is indeed *the* friend. Everything that appears is the manifestation of the Supreme Lord, He is the true friend. All pain and sorrow are due to the sense of "I" and "mine" The world is God's creation. In God is everyone and everything. Where is He not ? This is how Ma is also always near although the body does not go everywhere. In the *Paramātmā* there is no possibility of impurity or insincerity at all."

Matri Ṣatsang in Solan

Swami Bhagavatananda Giri

(Translated from Bengali)

(9)

Question : "*Sarva bhuta hite ratah*" ("—...intent on the welfare of all beings......") says the Bhagavad Gita. Mataji, so long as our lives are not self-restrained it is difficult to put this and similar injunctions into practice.

Mataji : This body sometimes says that it is difficult for men and women living a family life to be self-restrained. This opens the door to a wonderful subject. Formerly there were four *āśramas* : 1) The *Brahmacharya Aśrama*, 2) the Grihastha *Aśrama* (householders Aśrama), 3) the *Vanaprāstha Aśrama* (for men and women ritiring into seclusion to practise *sādhana*), the *Samnyāsa Asrama*. Thus previously one's life would be moulded from the beginning during the time spent in the *Brahmacharya Aśrama*. Those who experienced an overwhelming desire to renounce the world used to advance straight away to the *Samnyāsa Aśrama*. While others followed the normal path of householders after the stipulated period as Brahmacharis. In the householder's āśrama there is also the road that leads to God. '*Aśrama*' means a place where there is no *śrama* i. e. no strain resulting from one's efforts. That is why it is called an *āśrama*. Even while adopting the householder's āśrama people used to live a life of self-restraint. Those who had observed the rules and regulations of the Brahmacharya Aśrama had already received their training in self-mastery. Therefore they would strictly practise the restraints, manners, customs and regulations laid down for the *Grihastha Aśramā*. The Rishis were such householders. They had children of their own. Nowadays there is no such thing as the *Brahmacharya Aśrama.* This is why licentiousness and lack of self-control have come about. For the same reasons the *Vanaprastha Aśrama* and the *Samnyāsa* Aśrama are not being followed correctly. If the prescribed conduct and regulations were observed in the life of the householder, then the correct conduct and rules of the life in secluded retirement would automatically be followed. Thereafter, for such persons, life as a *samnyāsi* would be simple and straight forward. But because there is no observance of the rules of the first āśrama therefore there is no self-control thereafter in the lives of men and women. Even so, by strictly following the instructions tendered by one's Guru, it may be possible to reach that elevated state of existence.

Question : Mataji, nowadays it is difficult to find a real Guru. The Maharaja of Baroda once arranged a conference of pandits. The subject for discussion was "*Ahimsa*" (Nonviolence). Various pandits delivered long speeches. When at the end of his discourse, one of the speakers took a handkerchief from his pocket to wipe the perspiration from his face, an egg fell out of the handkerchief.

The Gurus of our days no longer wield any real influence. This is the saddest part of the picture. In my opinion a religion can only be called real when it leads to respect for humanity, truth, forbearance and equal regard for all.

Mataji : Pitaji, listen. There is something else to be said in this connexion. There was a pandit who used to recite the Ramayana very beautifully. Everybody was charmed when listening to his recitals. Some felt as if Sri Ramachandra himself were relating his story. A certain boy took initiation from the pandit. Later his whole family followed suit. The boy became so devoted to his Guru that there seemed to be no room for anything else in his life. The pandit could keep spell-bound a gathering of a thousand people. But his character was not good. The boy however was obsessed by his Guruji. His parents told him. "Why are you all the time after your Guru ? You must first complete your studies." The boy became deeply pained at hearing his parents blame his Guru. He would cry himself to exaustion. How wonderful to behold such a spectacle ! A sincere, artless boy—like a flower with its petals just blown open. The boy was absorbed in the thought : "I must find Rama." He felt, one must not stay anywhere where one's Guru is found fault with. Almighty Lord, what enchanting sights you hold up in front of us ! In reality it is God that pervades all forms. To see faults in others is itself a fault. It is due to duality. *Duniya* (world) means "based on duality". Because there are "two" one sees faults. Even in sinners and wicked beings God resides. He who is aware of this will indeed be victorious. If sins are overlooked then the evil tendencies of the sinner undergo a change for the better. This sort of thing has happened in front of this little girl. (Mataji points to Herself.) God has revealed Himself in this way as well.

The father told the boy: "I have heard that your Guru's character is not good." This body then remembered that the person who was that Guru's Guru had also misbehaved in a similar manner. People related this to me. But even so this body does not hold anyone in disrespect. It is not right to place an impediment on the path taken by anyone. The boy came to believe that his father was his enemy. But gradually, on growing up, he started reading religious books. Later, when he realized that his Guru's character was not good, he alienated himself of his own accord. How many men and women had become entangled there! Subsequently some of them came and confided everything to this body. One of them said: 'I do not feel like letting this defiled body live any longer. I replied: "You have no right to destroy your body. The very fact that you are now repenting is sufficient to atone for your past sins. Purify yourself.Nothing good would result from your death, on the contrary it would have evil consequences." That person was then saved by following the path that leads to God-realisation. All is God's play. Pitaji, as regards those who deliver brilliant speeches–well, this is just an art, a science. Consider the case of that *jagat guru* (world-teacher) who spoke so fascinatingly on non-violence and then produced on egg from his pocket! Such a brilliant speech, but people were completely disillusioned on seeing what happened subsequently. God is present in every form and appearance. It is fitting to remember this at all times. It is difficult to realize and easy to reject. All manifestations are but expressions of Thee. In this creation good and evil exist side by side. You are *Atmarām*, the Bliss of the Self. You are fortunate enough to be created in the image of God Himself. To rouse so much interest by mere words, to express beautiful sentiments so lucidly, all this is a matter of art—a skill. This art has nothing to do with the Supreme Being (Paramātmā). That art has been developed by certain persons. There can be a skill in the art of singing which entrances people. But this proficiency has no affinity with truth, religion or character.

It is extremely difficult to find a *Sad-guru*. * There was another great guru who had any number of disciples. He told one of them: "Accept bribes and send me the money." "In the end matters came to such a pass that the disciple had to sever his relationship with the guru. Truth Itself comes to the rescue of Truth. If you tell lies in the name of Truth, the lies will evaporate like camphor. God is omnipotent in His own Self. Ultimately He alone exists but He is a whimsical sovereign ! "In each and every form, Oh Lord, Thou Thyself art present." One must regard everything and everyone as THAT. The plant which is full of thorns also produces roses. "Oh Lord ! All forms and shapes are Thine alone !" This is most difficult to accept.

A book which contains wise counsel is called "*Guru Granth.*" The book itself is an expression of the Guru. No falsehood can come from the study of Sacred Scriptures or from the repetition of God's holy Name. Let those who have not found a Guru as yet call out : "Oh Lord, Thou art the Guru of the whole universe. Deign to arrange whatever is necessary for my well-being !' Remain immersed in the perusal of sacred Scriptures and see in which particular form He will reveal Himself to you. As long as He does not appear to you as *Sad guru*, so long should you persevere with your devotions. "All names, all forms, all qualities are Thine, oh Lord." Never cease to think about Him. The Name is *akṣarah*. (indestructible) it does not wane from day to day, therefore take refuge in His Name. By continuously clinging to Him who is the Supreme Being, you will be able to destroy your own negative qualities. Thereafter, how is it possible that He should not reveal Himself.? It is your duty to keep your eyes constantly fixed on one goal. Of Him alone must be the spoken word, all else is but futility and pain. Become a pilgrim on the road to Immortality. You have so often in the past set out on journeys leading to death, now take the road to Immortality.

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* ***Sad guru*** **A guru who shows the way to Self realisation.**

1. A play upon words: *Akṣara* means "indestructible" as well as "syllable."

Boundlessness

Elwood Decker

The chains of circumstance that seem to bind
Offer an Opportunity to Find
Greater Freedom than we have ever known
By wholly abiding in Love alone

We easily improve our attitude
With a good proportien of Gratitude
And when we express it wholeheartedly
We'te Liberating our identity

Fortunately the human mind is small
And Love is the Essence of Virtues all
When MA ANANDAMAYI Fills the mind
There's no room left for anything to bind !

From the Life of Mataji

Bithika Mukerji

(Continued from the last issue)

After Bholanath's death (1938).

Bholanath's passing away was an event of great moment in the lives of the devotees, firstly, because it was an irreparable personal loss for all those who knew him, and secondly, because nearly all of them had in some measure or other to reorient themselves in their understanding of Mataji.

In the beginning, as in other cases of bereavement, the local people hesitated to intrude upon Mataji; but they soon realized how ludicrous it was for them to think that Mataji would be found grieving over the death of Bholanath. Mataji' s attitude towards Bholanath's death was the same as it had been, and was to be in future towards the deaths of others who were closely connected with Her way of living in the world, and who were totally dependent upon Her for their well-being. While they were alive She seemed entirely concerned with their welfare, but She did not mourn their deaths. She has said in this context, "What is the occâsion for grief ? Nobody is lost to me. Do you feel sad when you are obliged to go from one room to another ?"

The ladies of Dehradun felt a little ashamed of themselves for attributing their own emotional reaction to Mataji, which they acknowledged to Her very soon. The general opinion was voiced by someone who said, "It is due to our limitations that we see you go through changes of time, like growing up or growing old, or changes in marital or social status. You are always the same and just what you are in yourself. So please continue to do as may be your *kheyāla* now as always."

Thus, no drastic changes were brought about in the mode of Mataji's life. Didi, waiting anxiously in Banaras for news of Mataji, got reassuring tidings that everything was quite as usual in the Ashram at Kishenpur. The attitude on the part of the devotees in this context brings to light Mataji's unique way of 'playing' the roles that She adopts. Nobody could doubt Mataji's concern for Her people, yet in the beginning they had to learn by experience about Her total self-sufficiency. An understanding and a compassion which are compatible with extreme detachment are hard to comprehend, especially when the enigmatic personality herself has nothing to say in explanation of her own way of projecting this image.

Mataji remained quietly at Dehradun for some time, occasionally visiting Raipur. There were very few people at the Kishenpur Ashram. Ruma Devi cooked the simple meals for Mataji and looked to the comforts of visitors. Manmatha Nath Chatterji, who had retired from service, was living in the Ashram. Abhaya, a youth who had attached himself recently to Mataji was a constant companion. Abhaya had many aggravating qualities, such as monopolizing Mataji's time to the exclusion of others; answering on behalf of Mataji the questions put to Her by visitors; being insensitive to the requirements of others to the point of rudeness. His sometimes very impertinent behaviour toward Mataji Herself would outrage the older devotees. All this was forgotten and forgiven again and again, because of his childlike devotion for Mataji on the one hand, and on the other his golden voice and marvellous repertoire of devotional songs, many of which he composed himself. Kirtan, before and since has never been the same, according to some people. Abhaya had the unique distinction of evoking a most indulgent compassion from Mataji which remains unrivalled so far. In himself he was a most charming and entertaining companion for all the younger members of the families visiting Mataji. Many young boys became his devoted followers in music; many others, with rather unfelicitious results tried to imitate him in his orientation toward Mataji without possessing his guileless spontaneity.

These events are demonstrative of Mataji's mode of affirmation or reformation of individuals strictly in their own rights. Cries of favouritism or partial behaviour can be heard amongst the people around Mataji. But a little reflection shows clearly that everyone evokes from Mataji the response that he merits. This is a fact which is hard to comprehend because it is not met within our ordinary everyday world. It can be experienced in the proximity of Mataji alone. Ordinarily, Mataji does not give definitive directions to people who come seeking Her guidance but only suggestions, which if they so wish, can be complied with. In other words, Mataji responds to the total personality of an individual, which She seems to perceive at a glance, and thus, no two people will get the same treatment. The one common denominator is that She calls everyone to his best efforts toward the highest endeavour, and She shows limitless concern for those who try. For failures She has nothing but compassion, and so, having once taken refuge with Her, no one need ever be afraid again. This also accounts for the very motley nature of Mataji's entourage. People from all walks of life, all age groups, any or no religious pursuasion, ascetics as well as householders, find the same quality of affirmation in Mataji and experience a sense of homecoming. The onus of understanding even a little of this entirely unparalleled personality, rests totally on the visitor. Nobody can explain things to everybody's satisfaction, because nobody has a clue to the mystery of Mataji's *kheyāla.*

Mataji's indifferent health at that time continued to cause anxiety to the devotees. Abhaya had the happy idea of writing and asking everyone who was willing to do so to engage in some *nāma-japa,* expressly for the purpose of praying for Mataji's health. He wrote to Didi also, who in turn conveyed the idea to others; in this way, probably for the first time, devotees distant from and unknown to each other, became united in a common resolve for prayers.

In the last week of July 1938, Mataji travelled to Solan and then on to Simla. This was Mataji's first visit to Simla after the death of Bholanath. The devotees of Simla largely consisted of Bengali officers of the Central Secretariat. Simla at that time used to be the summer headquarters of the Government. The periodic reassemblies had forged a common bond between such of the men and their families as were interested in keeping alive the tradition of *nāma-sankirtana*, sanctified by Sri Gauranga Mahaprabhu. This group of people had become very attached to Mataji and welcomed her joyfully in their midst. Not finding Didi with Mataji, they enquired about her. Didi had gone to Varanasi, Vindhyachal, Calcutta and Dacca according to Mataji's suggestions. She had been in Dacca during the Birth-day Celebrations. This was an especially poignant year for the devotees of Dacca because of Bholanath's death and also because the image of their beloved Kali had to be given its final internment inside its own little shrine.

Didi, although inconsolable at being separated from Mataji for so long, had realized how necessary her presence had been in Dacca at this time. Now she was happy to be recalled to join Mataji in Simla. Didi met Mataji for the first time since Bholanath's death and now eagerly listened to Her description of the events leading up to it. The devotees of Simla who had wanted to hear about it but had hesitated to broach the subject to Mataji, now had an opportunity to learn about these events. Mataji, in Her inimitable style related the whole incident in detail, recreating for Her audience the last hours of Bholanath's life.

Describing the last few hours which were characterised by Bholanath's serenity and calm acceptance of his imminent death in the face of which he said "ananda", Mataji asked Didi, "Did I not to do well to send my mother away with you and Swamiji? Without a doubt She would but have made this incident a matter of grief and lamentations. Whereas Bholanath's last minutes were so quiet and peaceful that not even the people in the room realized what had happened till I drew their attention to it by saying to the Kaviraj (ayurvedic doctor), "What do you say ? As far as your science goes, isn't everything over ?"

Then, with a half-smile Mataji added, "Some people are amazed to hear me talking like this about the death of Bholanath, and are a little shocked too." Many of the group of people sitting around Her protested that such thoughts had not occurred to them. Mataji turned and looked at an elderly lady and asked lightly, "What do you say, mother ? Isn't it shocking the way I talk so unconcernedly about the death of Bholanath ?"

This lady then joined her palms together and said humbly, "Yes, Ma, I must confess that such was exactly my reaction to your narration. However, I see that this is due to my lack of understading of what you are. We are unable to disassociate ourselves from human relationships and therefore automatically ascribe them to you. I am now taken aback at my own folly in thinking that you should be bound by such ties as we experience. Forgive us and bear with us." Mataji laughed away her apology and said that such thoughts were quite natural after all. The slight constraint which the people of Simla had created for themselves vanished and they gave themselves over to the joyous experience of having Mataji amidst them for a few days.

A woman asked Her one day, "Ma, I am quite unable to calm my mind and am in despair how to control its perpetual restlessness." "Mataji smiled and said, "What I would say is that your mind is by no means 'restless'. If you experience the restlessness of ardent yearning for God then at once you will be on the way to tranquillity. Learn to be really 'restless' ! "The woman was very delighted with this answer to her question.

On August 2nd Mataji expressed Her *kheyāla* to leave Simla. The residents at once raised strong objections. They were not at all willing to let Mataji leave them after such a short visit. They were then obliged to take note as it were, of another of the unique facets of Mataji's personality. Inspite of Her gentle demeanour and Her unfailing consideration for others, Her *kheyāla* was not to be gainsaid. It was not that She sought in any way to impose Her decisions on anybody, in fact it was quite to the contrary; but it always so happened that things arranged themselves in such a manner that Her *kheyāla* was borne out. Didi and other close companions had long since given up the idea that they were dogged by series of coincidences and had learnt to abide by Mataji's *kheyāla* to the extent to which they understood what it was that was required of them. The people of Simla were obliged to bid Mataji a sorrowful farewell for the time being.

Mataji went to Solan, about 2000 ft down and 30 miles away from Simla on the same mountain range, the home of Jogibhai and his wife the Rani Saheba of Baghat State, a princess of great ability and remarkable generosity, who always made people feel welcome and at home in Solan.

All officers of the princely household became involved in eager and willing service to Mataji and to all those who happened to be with Her.

Mataji stayed in Her usual place which was known as Shogibaba's temple in Solan. During the week-end the devotees of Simla came down and performed their beloved ritual of the *nāmayajña*, under the aegis of the Raja Sahib of Solan. Nothing gave these men greater pleasure than to be able to celebrate this function in the presence of Mataji.

From Solan Mataji went to Dehradun and stayed at the Ashram for a few days. On August 18th, Mataji went to Mussoorie accompanied by quite a large group of people. The local inhabitants quickly became attached to Mataji and as always and everywhere is the case with Mataji, the crowd of visitors kept on swelling continuously. One day, the entire party went on an expedition to see the view from the highest point of the mountain-town. Two dandies were hired to go along with them. While they were resting near a church, the coolies who carried the dandies started talking to Mataji. One of them said, "Look Mataji, (all women are addressed as such in India), this is called a church. The foreigners worship God here just as we worship Him in temples. After all, what difference is there amongst people of different religions ? We are like brothers born by the same mother, are we not ?" Mataji concurred and then She went on to say, "God alone is real, all else is illusion and a source of our forgetfulness of our real Self. But alas, we are such weak mortals that it is difficult for us to turn away from indulgence."

Mataji's companions were thoroughly enjoying this interlude. She Herself was in Her own inimitable fashion totally involved with Her newly found teachers. She said, "Is that so Pitaji ? Then I must begin to carry out the lessons you are teaching me. I shall give up the comfortable way of travelling and walk the rest of the way." With a mischievous look She left the coolies behind and started walking down the steep mountain path. The coolies were alarmed at this prompt obedience on the part of their student and ran after Her to pursuade Her to sit in the dandi again. Mataji went on with Her dialogue with the coolies, and ended up by saying that in remembrance of their conversation they should promise to devote a few minutes of every day to spiritual endeavour. They agreed readily and assured Mataji that they would never forget Her.

Mataji stopped in front of a sweets shop. Didi, interpreting this rightly, purchased lots of sweets which were distributed to all the coolies.

In the second week of September Mataji returned to Dehradun and almost immediately went to Hardwar.

(To be continued)

HYMN

J. N. Dhamija

O give me strength enough to break the chains
Of bondage we call life, I pray, Most High.
We sleep, awake and sleep again to dream,
We save and spend and thus our life doth end;
Pride and passions, Joys and pains, death, decay,
Our hopes and fears-shadows chasing shades.
Not knowing whence we came and where we go,
While Life's eternal stream in silence flows.
Open the portals wide, come flooding Light,
And let me see Thy Vision O Most High.
I seek Thy Grace, grant me my simple prayer,
Abide with me my Lord for ever abide.

Notice to Foreign Subscribers

Our Quarterly Journal has been struggling to make both euds meet inspite of unprecdented rise in the cost of paper, printing and postage. We greatly regret to inconvenience our subscribers but we are now forced to increase the annual subscription rates as stated below with effect from January 1976.

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A Visit to Naimisharanya

Subal Ganguly

"*Nimsar āgayā, Nimsar āgayā*" would shout the robust conductor of a rickety bus after it had jerked to a halt at a small wayside station somewhere on the way to Hardoi from Lucknow. Yes, this is Naimisharanya which in local parlance is known as Nimsar, situated at a distance of nearly 80 miles from Lucknow, in the district of Sitapur. Naimisharanya can be reached by rail as well as by bus. Today Nimsar has emerged into a new light with the blessings of Ma Anandamayi.

Naimisharanya is said to be the place where all the eighteen Puranas were composed by Vyasadeva and his son Sukdeva. Hailed in our scriptures as the most sacred place, Naimisharanya was visited by the Pandavas in the course of their pilgrimage (*Tirthayātra*). Sri Rama had come to this place to perform the "*Aswamedha Yajña*" after slaying Ravana. Here, at this place, on the bank of the Gomati river, Sita is said to have gone underground for ever. Lava and Kusha recited the Ramayana in the company of Rishi Viswamitra before Rama at this sacred spot. Lord Krishna and Balrama came to Naimisharanya on their pilgrimage. Prahlada, the great devotee, worshipped and meditated at this centre and Urvasi the famous beauty of heaven came to this spot with king Pururava. The *Matsya Purana* says: "*Tirthantu Naimisha nāma sarva tirthaphalapradam*". (Naimisharanya, the centre of pilgrimage, bestows the benefits gained by visiting all other places of pilgramage.) Similarly Tulsidas has written :

"*Tiratha vara Naimish vikhyātā*
Ati punita sādhaka siddhidātā
Basahi jahān muni samājā
Tah hiya harasi chale' manu rājā ||

"Outstandingly meritorious, confering fulfilment on the seeker after Truth is the pilgrimage to the famous and most sacred Naimisharanya, the abode of the company of sages to which Raja Manu hastened wish great rejoicing in his heart."

For centuries, however, Naimisharanya lay in obscurity until about fifteen years ago it was restored to its pristine glory by Mata Anandamayi. After a devastating flood Mataji visited the Swami Naradananda Ashram in Naimish on the occasion of a "Samyam Mahavrata" held there by the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha at the invitation of Swami Naradananda. Everyone was fascinated by the sylvan beauty and the spiritual atmosphere of the place. During those gatherings that are held in different places once a year, one of the Puranas is discussed every time. It was then discovered that not even one complete set of the eighteen Puranas was to be found in Naimisharanya, the place of their origin. It seemed fitting that the Puranas should be preserved at Naimish and also a portion of the Puranas read every day in rotation. The Puranas were procured, a pandit was engaged and the daily recitation started in Mataji's presence. Some devotees then decided to acquire a plot of land at the highest spot of Naimisharanya, namely at Hanuman Tila, in the name of the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha, where the foundation of a *Puran Mandir* was laid in Mataji's presence on 30-1-67. The temple was constructed by the Lotus Trust of Bombay under the leadership of Sri Manubhai Bhimani, a business magnate of Bombay. The temple was formally inaugurated on 11-12-67. It contains marble statues of Vyasadeva and Sukdeva in niches and a casket of sandalwood and glass in the centre in which copies of all the eighteen Mahapuranas are being preserved. The Puranas are read daily in rotation. Since the opening of the temple Mataji used to frequent this place. Gradually an ashram grew up. When in 1968 Swami Akhandananda Saraswati held a *Bhagavata Paksha* in the Ashram, he suggested that a *vigraha* of *Puran Purusha*, the presiding deity of the Puranas should be installed. Another temple was then built and the statue of Puran Purusha was consecrated on *Akshaya Tritiya*, which fell on May 14th, 1975.

This was the occasion which took me to Naimish in a party of thirty-one men and women, led by our Gurudeva, well known as Bholababa. An invitation from Mataji had been sent to our Gurudeva and I also did not miss the opportunity to squeeze with my family into the group which consisted of devotees from Calcutta, Patna and Dinapur, led by our Gurudeva.

On May 11th, burning in the oppressive heat and "loo" (hot wind), we reached Naimish at midday by a chartered bus from Lucknow. A number of tents had been pitched in the vicinity of the Puran Mandir and we were allotted three of them. Cots were brought and carpets spread within an hour and after that a decent camp-life followed.

The surroundings of Naimisharanya are unique. The River Gomati, with chest-deep water flowed close by and all of us would have refreshing baths every morning and evening. Sand-dunes and undulating land could be seen on all sides. A number of tall, majestic-looking trees and a few ashramas lay in the vicinity of our tents that had been pitched on elevated land. Very recently a cave with a wall-figure of Hanumanji was discovered underground. A little behind our tents was "Pancha Pandava Mandir". It is said that the Pandavas spent a few years in disguise at this spot.

From early morning the plaintive calls of peacocks would resound in the air. Free, unfettered peacocks moving from one tree to another were a heavenly sight. As the day lengthened, the heat became unbearable and after midday we would toss on our camp-beds with soaked towels on our heads which would dry up very soon and the heat would burn us inside out. The evenings under the shady banyan trees would bring some relief.

We had a *dars'ana* of Ma Anandamayi soon after our arrival. Clad in white, wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, Mata Anandamayi beamed with joy as She received us. A photograph of Mataji that hung on the wall of the Ashram, carried the following poem :

Like moonlight Her refulgent soothing smile,
Chases away the looming shadows of the mind,
While captivating sweetness of Her illuminating speech,
Fills with sustaining bliss the entire universe."

How true this is of Mata Anandamayi who radiates divine Love and Joy! During the few days that I saw Mother, I was simply overwhelmed. In spite of Her eighty years of age. Ma showed tremendous dynamism. From early morning, She had no rest, moving all over, from kitchen to temple, paying attention to all details, attending prayer meetings, bestowing blessings on hundreds of devotees, looking after guests. Whether it was the Governor of U. P. Dr Channa Reddy, or Sri Gulzarilal Nanda or a commoner, Ma had Her kind eyes on everybody.

*

A personality who impressed me with his erudition was Brahmachari Nirmalananda, the Secretary of Mataji's Delhi Ashram. An M. A. in Sanskrit of the Delhi University he explained many difficult aspects of the Puranas in lucid English. Quoting from scriptures he pointed out that the Puranas denote eternal truths in ever new form. Puranas also signify intuitive knowledge through which our ancient life breathes. He emphasised that all religions were basically one and built on the essence, *Satchidananda.*

I was equally impressed by a few other ashramites. The devotion and knowledge of some of them were simply admirable. There was perfect order and dicipline in Mataji's Ashram. The kitchen was run by a band of devoted men and women. The variety of delicious food left an unforgettable taste in our mouths. I shall always remember the ever smiling persons who attended to the guests in a truly dedicated spirit of service.

I happened to hear about one of the numerous miracles of Ma from Sri Manubhai Bhimani, who had come with the aid of a nurse and a doctor. Sri Bhimani, who was behind the construction of the Puran Mandir, told me that he had a serious car accident in Bombay some fifteen months ago. There was no hope of his surviving. Trunk-calls were put through to Mataji who was then at Calcutta. She replied: "Give best treatment. Trust in God". For sixteen days Manubhai lay as if without life. Then consciousness returned miraculously. "What I am today is all due to Ma", declared humble Manubhai with tears in his eyes.

I met a few young American men who had assembled in the Ashram. Two of them, fresh from the Universities, would daily bathe in the river Gomati, meditate, read Scriptures and pray. I found them to be jolly good companions. An American girl who would turn her beads all the time with her eyes closed, told me that she had been drawn to India by reading books on Tibetan Buddhism. One American, influenced by Swami Yogananda, had come to India to see Ma.

Our life in the tents was of unalloyed joy. We would wake up daily to the tunes of devotional and classical songs played on the tape recorder of one of our neighbours. After our morning ablutions we would hurry to the Pandal where the Srimad Bhagavata would be expounded daily by Pandit Srinath Shastri. His exposition of the Bhagavata Purana commenced on May 9th and continued up to the 16th. Then and also in the evenings Swami Akhandananda Saraswati would explain the Puranas in a captivating manner. In between the *lilting* devotional songs of Chhabi Bandopadhyaya would reverberate in the sky and in our hearts.

May 14th will go down as the most memorable day as the statue of 'Puran Purush' was installed. A colourful procession with festoons, buntings and multi-coloured flags was taken out in the small town. For a short while Mataji walked in the hot sunshine with a wet towel on Her head, followed on foot by Dr. Channa Reddy, the Governor of the U.P. and many other dignitaries. Then everyone got into cars. The songs of Chhabi Bandopadhyaya echoed and re-echoed in the streets. After the *Nagar Parikramā* (circumambulation round the town) the image was installed at 11-30 a.m. with floral offerings amidst the chanting of hymns and prayers.

The night of May 14th was equally remarkable as *ārati* with more than one lakh of wicks was performed by the priests under the canopy of the clear, moon-lit sky. Devotional songs in Sanskrit, Bengali and Hindi mingled in the air as Mataji sat motionless on the stairs of the temple and watched. It was indeed a heavenly sight for the gods to see men and women in ecstasy prostrating before Ma and She declared with a voice quivering with emotion that it was the united efforts of all the assembled devotees that had made successful the consecration of the temple of Puran Purush. She invited all to come again and again to this holy place.

With tears in our eyes we bade good-bye to Naimisharanya on the morning of the 15th of May after four sweetest days that we shall cherish for ever.

Holy Reminiscences

Jainath Kaul

(Continued from the last issue)

5. At Allahabad During Durga Puja

In 1958 *Durga Puja* was celebrated in the presence of Ma, at the residence of the late Sri Baleshwar Prasad, Advocate of the High Court of Allahabad, from the 18th to the 22nd October. Ma had gone from Varanasi to Allahabad on the 14th, but two days earlier, on Her way to Varanasi from Hoshiarpur, She had halted in Delhi for a day. The following morning I had gone to the railway station to see Her off, and when the train had just started moving, She graciously asked me to come to Allahabad for the *Puja* celebration.

So I had gone there, accompanied by my second son Ajay, then only fourteen, his three younger sisters and their mother. On arrival we had found a fairly spacious room reserved for our use in one of the houses nearby. Ma had just shifted from the Ashram of the late Sri Gopal Thakur, after spending three days there, to the residence of the late Sri N. N. Mukerji, where, in the midst of his beautiful garden, a separate small bungalow had been newly constructed for Her use. When we went there for Ma's Darshan after settling down in our new temporary home, She generously enquired about our lodging, showing thereby Her compassionate solicitude for the comfort of those, in particular, for whom She may, at any time, have the *kheyāla* to ask them to come.

The *Pandal* (large tent) and its main entrance at Sri Baleshwar Prasad's residence had been artistically decorated, the general arrangements were also very good and by Ma's grace the entire function turned out to be a great success.

Caught and Brought

One day, during the celebrations, when hundreds of devotees had gathered in the *pandal* for Ma's *darśana* and *sangha*, an exchange of ideas on our spiritual future had taken place among those in whose midst I happened to be seated. When many had seemed to agree that only a few among the thousands who come to Ma could hope to attain to spiritual heights, an old and well-known devotee, Sri S. N. Aga, from our group, suddenly addressed Ma loudly thus : "Ma, so many of us come to you. Are all of us going to pass, or will some fail also ?" And Ma replied back immediately, "Do you come by your own free will ? You are caught and brought here."

Mother's gracious Responses

Another day, when we had gone in the morning for Ma's *darśana*, Ma was sitting beside the *Durga Pratima* (Image), which had been installed on a raised flooring at one end of the *pandal*. To prevent unauthorized persons from entering this sanctified area (*puja mandap*), a one-foot-or-so high latticed barricade had been put up above and along the lengthwise edge of the *mandap*, with proportionate pillars rising a few inches higher at intervals in between.

In this situation, since the devotees in general could not go very near Ma, they came up to the barricade, did *pranāma* (obeisance) and such of them as had garlands to offer, hung them on the pillar nearest to Ma. Accordingly, when we came, we did the same except my eldest daughter Vijay Lakshmi, then just twelve years old, who, to our horror, threw her garland at Ma before we could prevent her from doing so. But, to our sheer amazement, as the garland reached Ma, She burst out laughing. Disapproving of Vijay Lakshmi's action, I reprimanded her, but started smiling myself when I heard her say, with her characteristic innocence : "Everyone was garlanding the pillar as if it was for worshipping the pillar that they had brought their garlands. But I had brought mine for offering it to Ma and not to the pillar." Evidently, Ma's gracious response was due to Her having been aware instantly of this delightful reasoning, while ignoring, with divine mercy, the child's consequent impulsive action.

The following small incident provides a glorious example of how Mother encourages struggling beginners like me. One day Ma was sitting in the *pandal* at a place where devotees could approach Her without any restriction. A couple of yards away I was standing behind Ma at an angle from where I could see Her but She could not see me. As usual, the devotees were coming to Her with fruit, sweets, flowers, etc., and were doing *pranāma*, one after another. As I was watching them my attention was drawn towards a girl of about ten years or so. She had come to Ma and offered Her a flower, with a remarkably graceful poise and affection. In return, I noticed Mother giving her a richly-deserved full measure of gracious love and blessings. The sight thrilled me, fusing my entire mental and emotional being into oneness with the inspiring rare veneration of an innocent *bhakta* and the divine grace of *Bhagavan*. But just when I was thus lost in witnessing this purifying *līlā*, Ma suddenly turned round and threw a garland at me.

In relating this holy reminiscence, I am reminded of what happened on another occasion at Delhi Railway Station a few years back. Ma had alighted from the train and was proceeding towards the main exit, accompanied by a large number of devotees. I happened to be just hehind Ma, and after we had covered about half the way to the exit, the thought suddenly came to me that there had been a time when Rama lived on this earth and those with a rare good fortune moved about with Him. And now Ma was here in our midst like Ram and we in this group were today as fortunate as they had been in the past. I remember clearly that as this thought crossed my mind, Ma turned Her head back and glanced at me without stopping. I am sure this was not done just to tell me that She knew my thoughts, but, more important, to provide me with yet another gracious *līlā*, by recalling which I could remember Her over and over again.

Darśana of Joyous Surprise

Because of the four children in our party we took breakfast at our lodging before having Ma's *darśana* at the *puja* site. One night, after dinner, I announced that I would not eat anything the next morning before having Ma's *darśana*. So, next day, when Vijay Lakshmi and I went out to buy something for breakfast, we purchased, among other items, just five pieces of a sweet, one each for the children and their mother. On our return trip, after we had passed by Anand Bhawan, the ancestral residence of the Nehrus, I thought of pointing out the building to Vijay Lakshmi, and so turned round in the rickshaw to do so. But when I did this, I noticed in the distance a car coming in our direction with a person in *gerua* sitting near the driver. Thinking that perhaps Ma might be in the car, I asked the rickshaw-man to pull the rickshaw aside to allow us to get down. He did that and we had an excellent *darśana* of Ma.

Afterwards, when we returned to our lodging this news was given to everyone. All the same, I failed to appreciate that Ma had graciously fulfilled my self-imposed condition for eating in the morning. For, in my mind the thought had been firmly planted that since Ma's *darśana* could be had only in the *pandal* in the morning, the question of eating could not arise before going there. And so I asked all others to go ahead and have breakfast without me. However, someone—perhaps my youngest daughter Jai Lakshmi—protested at once, saying "But Papa, you have had Ma's *darśana* already", and it was only then that I realized what Ma had done and so joined them with joyous remembrance of the welcome unexpected *darśana*. What was still more remarkable about this incident was that among the food articles bought we found six pieces instead of five of the particular sweet mentioned above—one extra for me—a moving token of loving omnipotence !

Nature's Fury Controlled

On *Ashtami* (eighth day of *Durga Puja*) there was such a sudden and heavy downpour in the evening that almost the entire *pandal* was thoroughly soaked with water. A canopy of tarpaulin had no doubt been fixed to protect the *Pratima* when it had been installed a couple of days earlier. But the torrential rain produced a dangerous sag in the tarpaulin.

The *Brahmacharis* responsible for the *Puja* brought bamboos and tried to push up the sagging part in an attempt to empty it of the accumulated water. But the moment Ma saw this, She asked them to stop that at once and directed them instead to "Pray to the Devi" (Goddess).

I was watching all this and when I heard Ma's directive, I felt quite sure that the rain would not continue and that no harm would come to the *Pratima*. Firmly convinced of this I even told my son Ajay, when we had returned to our lodging, that the rain would soon stop that night. And that was exactly what happened. Ajay asked me next morning, "How did you know that the rain would not continue, Papa ?" And I replied, "Durga Puja in the presence of Ma is not an ordinary affair. If the rain had continued, the canopy would have collapsed and the *Pratima*, when exposed to rain, would have been ruined. This, I was sure, could never happen when Ma had directed us to pray and not to rely on our feeble efforts to save it."

And so, on the *Navmi* (Ninth day), *puja* and *ārati* were performed freely and the final function on *Dashmi* (Tenth day) was also celebrated as if nothing of any consequence had taken place at all—a miracle indeed of Ma !

Our memorable visit to Allahabad ended on the 22nd of October. We returned to Delhi having thoroughly enjoyed our participation in the *Puja* celebration, in obedience to Mother's command. Of course, the happiest in our group was naturally my second daughter, Ajay Lakshmi who had been included in the group of blessed girls choosen for *Kumari Puja* and had thereby become a recipient of some presents and special attention of Ma.

THREE POEMS :

Monique Peace

The Search

Time is fleeting, and nowhere is He.
How I long for His eternal embrace.
When I listen to the wind,
He speaks to me.
When I listen to the birds,
He sings to me.
When I smell the flowers,
He looks at me.
But where shall I find Him ?
When shall we be united forever ?

Gopi

How I hear your call,
Always *You* dwell in my thoughts,
You can play on your flute,
You can sing and dance,
But *You* cannot hide the stillness
of your mind,
You cannot escape this Gopi,
I know, because we are *One*.

The Offering

I sat by the pond and plucked
a bouquet of wild flowers.
They are for you, reader,
For they possess the freshness of the spring,
The serenity of the fields,
And the reflexion of Heaven.

Eternal Voices of the 20th Century and the Universal Mother Divine, Sri Anandamayi Ma.

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True spirituality helps mankind to tide over all economic travails. The quest of the soul brings in the brotherhood of men under the fatherhood of God.

It is fortunate that the eternal voices of the twentieth century are deeply conscious of the complexity of the modern world. Still, they inspire us with the lofty ideal of life. Rabindranath Tagore in his inimitable way has said about the spiritual longing of man that it is a yearning for the Infinite, not to be compared with desires for earthly pleasures or with material cravings. The great poet exclaims :

"It is only known to me,
He who has heard the Eternal voice,
Rushes into trials and tribulations,
Forsakes everything for the great cause,
Torments he takes on his breast,
Hears the rumblings of death as music,
Fire burns him,
Pierces him the spear,
Severs him the axe.

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* Based on a lecture delivered by the writer on the occasion of Mataji's birthday in May, 1975, at the Institute of Chandernagar, Bengal.

Kindles he the Sacrificial Fire
With all that is dear and beloved
As fuel to ignite the Spark."

Tolstoy who had burning love for mankind and who, in the face of the oppression of the people by the Czars of Russia with the approval of the churches, declared that he believed in the religion of Christ but not in the religion of the churches, had as a result to undergo severe trials at the hands of the church fathers. Tolstoy, who was regarded as a spiritual preceptor in Europe, uttered in his great book "My Confessions" : "Spiritual causes lie at the root of man's life and development and they are the ideals which govern him. These ideals find expression in religion, in science and art and in the forms of government, and rise higher from one stage to another till man at last reaches his highest good. I am myself a man and therefore called upon to assist in making the ideals of humanity known and accepted."

How much the Indian seekers after Truth get enthused on hearing the voice of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation. Gandhiji says : "I feel that India's mission is different from that of others. India is fitted for the religious supremacy of the world. There is no parallel in the world for the process of purification that this country has voluntarily undergone. Other nations have been votaries of brute force. India can win all by soul force." ("Nonviolent Way to World Peace" by M. K. Gandhi).

Is it not inspiring for men in quest of God in the twentieth century to hear T. S. Eliot, the great English poet, who says :

"We build in vain unless the Lord builds with us,
Oh, weariness of man who turns from God."

And then his remarks on modern civilization :

"There is no water, but rock,
Where there is no temple there is no house,
Man without God is seed upon the wind,
Driven this way and that way,
Finding no place of lodgement and germination."

Above all, the clarion call of Swami Vivekananda will guide the men and women of this age on the path divine with force aud vigour. It was he who said there could be no religion until and unless everyone in this country could get sufficient food and shelter and enjoy health. It was he who dreamt of ushering in Vedantic socialism and humanism and it was Swami Vivekananda who uttered the immortal words :

"Hear ye children of immortality ! We are the children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, wholly perfect. Come up, o lions, shake off the delusion that you are sheep. You are souls immortal, spirits free, blessed, eternal. You are not bodies. Matter is your servant and not you the servant of matter."

The great seer and yogi Sri Aurobindo in his "Life Divine" throws out a challenge to all materialistic thinkers when he tells us : "The ascent to the divine life is the only real human journey, the work of works. This alone is man's real business in the world and the justification of his existence without which he would be only an insect or a speck of surface—mud and water which has managed to form itself amid the appalling immensity of the physical world."

Can materialism stifle the voices of these sublime great thinkers dedicated to the cause of spiritual enlightenment for mankind in the twentieth century ?

All these great personalities are revered men of the age; they preached their message and published books of supreme importance to humanity.

But lo and behold the miracle of the twentieth century in the spiritual firmament, the Universal Mother Divine, Sri Anandamayi Ma. She has not written any books. She does not quote Scriptures but She is Herself the embodiment of the Scriptures. She stands as illustration of what the sacred books try to convey, She only knows how to dedicate all to God. She is the Goddess incarnate, drowned in illumination. She says : "I know nothing;" but thousands of men and women, some of vast erudition and scholarship, knowing everything from earth to heaven, fall at Her feet to seek divine mercy. She sings like a child. People hear Her in rapture and feel inspired, She moves about, She talks and people jostle and cluster around Her. Divine sparks spread everywhere. She is ambrosial bliss. She is the culmination of human evolution for centuries. There are no magic, no tricks, no spiritual circus-manship about Her. No machinery for propaganda of false supernatural happenings. No vain-glorious self-glorification for the preservation of superstitions and dead creeds and customs in the name of religion. She is all Light and Illumination, open like wind and air. She is the sublime manifestation of Divinity. There is nothing but God in Her.

Come, oh men and women of the twentieth century, have Her *darśana*, get divine intoxication. You have not seen Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. You have had no opportunity to be face to face with Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, come hither, come hither ! See in Her the molten bliss of heaven, the Absolute of the Vedanta moving on earth to give you all bliss.

In conclusion we pray: "Oh, Universal Mother Divine, accept our thousands of salutations and bless us at this auspicious moment. In ecstacy we offer our humble oblations at Thy lotus feet. Thou art for all, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the saints and the sinners. No temples and churches confine Thee, wherever devotees shed tears, there Thou art. Let us bow our heads in devotion and wonder at Thy blessed feet, oh Miracle of the Ages."

"It is man's bounden duty to choose and gather about him that which helps the remembrance of God."

Mataji

Contemporary Saints and Sages

NIMKAROLI BABA

Vijayananda

It was April 13th, 1957, Chaitra Sankranti, the day when the sun enters the sign of his Ram, an important festival day in India.

I was living at the time in our ashram at Varanasi. I had just been through a period of intensive spiritual exercises, and, as frequently happens in such cases, the reaction came in the form of an attack of mental depression. Feeling that some form of activity would do me good, I had asked the administration of the ashram to assign me some kind of task that would be useful but not very demanding; and so I had been asked to water the flowers and bushes in a part of the ashram garden. In April the heat in Varanasi is intense, a desiccating heat that dries up both human beings and plants; people need to drink a great deal and the flowers too need water.

It was early in the afternoon—my free hour–and with a *gamcha* (Hindu napkin) knotted about my waist to serve as apron I was conscientiously setting about my new task.

Visitors to the ashram were not rare and generally I paid very little attention to them. One now passed very close by me. He was "a great strapping fellow" with a long moustache and dressed quite ordinarily in a white dhoti. His head was clean shaven leaving only a lock of hair on the crown in the custom of orthodox upper caste Hindus. He appeared to be a brahmin such as one frequently encounters in the streets of Varanasi. A young man, similarly dressed, accompanied him. The "great fellow" glanced sideways at me, not without sympathy, and I heard him murmur to his companion, "*Ingrezi*" (an Englishman). This is a generic term used by Hindus for anyone from the west. Then he disappeared into one of the ashram buildings.

A few minutes later one of the sadhus in the ashram came up to me and asked : "Do you know that Nimkaroli Baba is here ?"

I had never met Nimkaroli Baba, the yogi whose name radiated an aura of mystery and miracle and I had long wished to have his *darśana.*

"Where is he ?" was my immediate reaction.

"He is sitting on the terrace of the Annapurna Mandir" (a temple dedicated to that aspect of the Divine Mother, in which she provides physical as well as spiritual nourishment).

Before my interlocutor had completed his answer I was already untying my *gamcha* and racing at full speed up the stairway leading to the temple terrace.

Nimkaroli Baba was sitting on an *āsana* surrounded by a few eminent members of the ashram. It was my "great strapping fellow" of a short while ago. Respectfully I made a *pranāma*, the customary salutation offered to a sage, and he invited me to sit beside him. Then he put a few questions to me in Hindi, my name and so on. He seemed, I cannot say why, to feel a sudden surge of sympathy for me. He was offered refreshments, a glass of buttermilk, but insisted that I should be offered some as well and did not drink until another glass had been fetched.

Various members of the ashram came up, one by one, to pay their respects. To each he spoke a few words of appreciation, occasionally adding some remark prophetic of the future. Of a few, including myself, he commented, "*Sant hai*" ("He is a saint"). He looked intently at me with eyes that seemed to plumb the future and said : "Varanasi suits you well for the moment but *pahār jaigā, pahār jaigā* (you will be going to live in the mountains)."

At the time I was deeply attached to Varanasi and felt that I should pass all my life in that town. I had neither the desire, nor any intention whatever of going to live in the mountains. Two years later, however, I changed my mind and spent the summer of 1959 at Almora in the Himalayas, returning to Varanasi for the winter. Then, in the beginning of 1960, I went back to Almora to stay, and since then I have lived permanently in the Himalayas, going down to the plains for brief spells only, in mid-winter. Thus the prophecy of Nimkaroli Baba has come to pass.

The sage arose. He had an invitation to a private house in the neighbourhood. I accompanied him to the ashram gate and while we walked he kept repeating my name, ceaselessly, like a litany : "Vijayananda, Vijayananda... —".

Nimkaroli Baba was a great yogi in the old tradition of Matsyendranath, Gorakshanath and others. In theory his headquarters were at Lucknow in the north of India; but in actual fact nobody ever knew where exactly he was at any moment or where he was about to go. He would turn up unexpectedly at the house of a disciple, then disappear mysteriously. He had no possessions and carried no luggage, not even the traditional water pot. When he happened to be at a disciple's house he changed the dhoti he was wearing for another that was freshly washed. All sorts of miraculous tales are told about him. Here are a few which I have heard and which I have every reason to believe to be authentic :

(1) A *samnyāsi* of our ashram whom I have known intimately over many years was present one day at the kumbha Mela in Allahabad. In the course of a discussion with some other sadhus the conversation turned upon the subject of Nimkaroli Baba. The samnyāsi declared that if indeed Nimkaroli Baba was an authentic yogi he should appear before them if invoked; and at once — perhaps simply as a joke—he began to repeat aloud the name of Nimkaroli. Almost immediately the sage appeared.

(2) Around the middle of November in 1962, the situation in India was critical. The Chinese had invaded the country in October, were advancing victoriously on all fronts, and now threatened Assam. India seemed to be on the verge of collapse.

An important political figure whose name I do not wish to mention and who was a disciple of Nimkaroli Baba was then in Delhi. He considered leaving the capital and phoned his Master for advice. Nimkaroli Baba told him to make no move and assured him that the very next day the situation would be normal again. It seemed impossible that matters should be settled within such a short time and the politician pressed for explanations, but his Master only insisted that all would be well.

The next day came the announcement of the decision by the Chinese to put an end to hostilities and return to their original positions—a decision which was quite unpredictable and came as an entire surprise.

(3) The most extraordinary story of all is the following : At the outset of his career Nimkaroli Baba had been an itinerant monk wandering up and down the length and breadth of India. He often travelled by train, and in the way of so many sadhus even today did not trouble to purchase a ticket. One day a ticket inspector came into his compartment. Inspectors generally turn a blind eye where sadhus are concerned, but this particular one was pitiless. As soon as the train reached the next stop he made Nimkaroli Baba get off, threatening severe punishment if he got on again. It was a little wayside station and the train was due to leave in a few minutes. The guard waved the green flag, the station-master blew his whistle and the driver started the engine but……the train refused to budge. The driver checked the engine carefully but there was nothing wrong. Carriage after carriage was examined in order to discover what was causing the delay. Everything, it seemed, was in order; but still the train refused to move.

All this while Nimkaroli Baba had remained on the platform, a slightly mocking smile perhaps playing over his countenance. As the station staff all bustled about trying to solve the mystery, someone suggested that perhaps the Mahatma was a great yogi and it was his magic power that was holding up the train, Hindus, especially the village-folk remain very credulous. They believe that by the power of their austerities certain yogis can work miracles of any kind whatever.

One of the station employees approached Nimkaroli Baba and begged him to get on the train again. The sage did so, returned to his compartment, took his seat......and the train immediately moved off.

Westerners, generally, are sceptical about miracles. Even the miracles mentioned in the Bible are treated as "legends" or "fables' or, at best, as "symbolic stories" conveying hidden teachings, and many believers can be at peace with themselves only by looking for scientific explanations. The miraculous cures at Lourdes, and instances of levitation by Christian mysties are certainly accepted by religious people but, as it were, despite themselves. The average intellectual in the west would be ashamed to declare publicly that he believed a miracle to be anything more than a daydream or a Christmas story.

But what precisely is a miracle ? A fact, an incident that startles the mind by its disruption of natural laws ? Something which was believed to be impossible and which nevertheless comes about ? Certainly, there are miracles of this nature. But the true miracle is the transference of the object of our desires and dreams out of the realm of imagination where it exists, into that of concrete tangible reality so that it becomes the fact we have wished it to be. The transference itself may be supernatural or may be simply an apparently trivial fact.

Actually it is in the subjective aspect that the mechanism of a miracle must be studied, for the levers of magic operate in the psychological sphere, and the explanation of the miraculous fact can be psychological only, never scientific.

To begin with, one must accept the hypothesis that "it is mind which creates matter", that thought, if it is sufficiently powerful and concentrated, may crystallize itself into a visible form or into a series of events.

In principle a yogi who has achieved perfect control of his mind, not only on the conscious level but also down to the deepest level of the unconscious–that is to say, to the instinct of self-preservation, has the power, potentially, to work any miracle whatever.

This is only the theory, however; in practice, the whole matter is far more complex. First of all a perfect yogi is one with the "Origin of things" and by virtue of this fact his desires and aspirations have all been achieved. But the production of a miracle calls for will and desire, both factors that do not exist in the perfect Being.

Secondly, there is no such thing as an autonomous individual mind. The individual is no more than a wave, a slip stream in the ocean of the universal mind. In the mental realm, as in the physical, there is a ceaseless interaction between individual elements, a continual exchange of thought. It follows that the miracle worker does not exist in isolation. He exists only as a function of the man who is watching him, and a miracle can occur only when the two synchronise their actions as a couple of dancers do, for instance. The man upon whom the miracle is being worked must be sufficiently receptive, his mind must have been "permeabilised" to begin with. In a word he must *believe*, even if only in the deepest depths of his unconscious, in the possibility of the supernatural fact. Indeed in most cases he must himself call the miracle into being by a desire or an expectation formulated in the present or in the past. Confronted by the insurmountable wall of incredulity raised by most western minds, the miracle worker would be powerless. For scepticism is an inverted faith, often far more powerful than faith itself.

At the end of the last century, when the English attacked Tibet, the lama magicians of that country assured their soldiers that they had nothing to fear, for the power of their magic rites would turn the bullets of the Englishmen back upon themselves. In actual fact, however, it was the soldiers of the Dalai Lama who were killed by the English bullets. At first sight, this might seem to prove that the Tibetan magicians cherished fond illusions about their own powers; but it is not impossible that they did, in fact, possess such powers; only that the powers were rendered ineffective by the total incredulity of the English soldiers ?

It is a well-known fact that faith alone is sufficient to work miracles, but what is needed is the faith that the evangelist speaks of, the faith that can move mountains. This faith is, in fact, the very basis of our mental processes. First come the random impressions received by our senses. The mind gathers these together, sorts them out, ties them up into an interpretation drawn from memory, and compares them with other similar experiences. Then whatever it is that lies at the centre of our thought-mechanism sets the rubber-stamp on the group of perceptions: "that's a man, it's not a tree"; "this exists, that doesn't exist"; "this is good, that is bad", and so on. When we see a tree, for instance, we have no doubt whatever about the reality of what we see. Our faith in the existence of the object is absolute and unshakable. Despite this, a careful analysis of the physiological mechanism of our perceptions and their psychological interpretation must inevitably lead to the concusion that the objective existence of the object, far from seing scientifically demonstrated, is actually no more than a hypothesis. Similarly, when dreaming, we have the same absolute faith in the reality of our dream phenomena; it is only when we wake up that we say, "It was only a dream". In the final count it is our belief, our faith in their existence which imparts to objects their empiric reality. But to return to *actual facts*. What then are the conditions under which a miracle can come about ?

(1, A perfect sage, one who possesses all powers in potential, will use them only in exceptional circumstances; for as I have already said, he is completely free from even the slightest trace of desire or will. The supernatural event, may however, come to pass with him playing the role of an unconscious intermediary. When this happens, he is serving simply as a channel for the cosmic will. Most miracles attributed to saints fall into this category. In other circumstances a sage may momentarily identify himself with the desire or aspiration of a disciple or a suppliant and so realise them.

(2) The great yogi miracle workers generally fall slightly short of absolute perfection and their their miracles.

have as their object the welfare of the world or the spiritual progress of one or more of their disciples.

(3) As for those who work miracles for their own personal ends taking it for granted that they are not just common conjurors, their power is very limited indeed. For the power of the yogi is in inverse proportion to that of the ego. The annihilation of the ego leads to perfection, its assertion increasingly limits it. Besides, a magician who uses a power for personal ends will sooner or later lose it and expose himself to serious consequences.

Most "professional miracle-workers", if I may dare to use the term, do not make direct use of their own will or powers of concentration in order to realise the supernatural. Such a "personal" effort would have the effect of stimulating the ego and this would automatically induce a weakening nay, even a total loss, of the yogic power. The true yogi uses, as a lever, the "Power of the Other". This "Other" is most frequently God and the simplest means of winning His favour is a fervent and sincere prayer.

But sometimes, too, the miracle-worker may make an appeal to a cosmic power, a deva, a "dragon" or a "spirit". Whether such powers have a real or an imaginary existence, whether their life is merely a temporary and ephemeral one breathed into them by the yogi--all these are quite unimportant questions. What is true is that this relatively simple and effective method has been used by magicians in all ages and in all countries.

"But if miracles do indeed take place", the western intellectual will insist, "it should be possible to verify them and to study them by modern methods".

And so he sets out in the track of the yogis, equipped with ultrasensitive cameras, and electronic machines, with electro-cardiographs and electro-encephalographs and heaven knows what else.

But a miracle--a true miracle--is not acted out in public like a scene on the stage. If it is, then one may rest almost assured that it is an illusion and that the magician is, in fact, no more than a very clever conjuror.

A real miracle is a living thing which surges into being when contact has been established with the immense cosmic power underlying the world of our perceptions. For the spectators it has a deep and precise significance more important than the supernatural fact itself. Very often it marks a turning point in their psychological life, a new orientation in their thinking and their behaviour. I myself have been on more than one occasion the witness or the instrument of a miracle--a flower opening out spontaneously in one's hand, for instance, rain falling exactly at the time requested, not just once but again and again, the rapid movement of an apparently incurable illness in the direction of cure without any medicine having been administered.

And in each case there was a deep meaningfulness, enormously more vast, more moving and more convincing than the miracle itself. Thus a scientific enquiry by modern techniques would be both out of place and futile.

The miracles performed by the great yogis never have it as their object to "bowl" the public "over". Their purpose is always to teach a lesson and sometimes, to act in the nature of shock therapy, and produce a spiritual awakening. And in all probability this was true of the miracles of Nimkaroli Baba.

Mātri Līlā

July 15th—October 1st, 1975

Mataji reached Kankhal from Naimisharanya on July 16th. On the 17th (*Sankranti* day) *Akhaṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa* was held in the Ashram hall, ending on the 18th morning in Mataji's presence. On July 23rd Gurupurnima was celebrated. People had arrived gradually from the day Mataji had come. Mataji would give *darśana* usually twice daily. On the 23rd many more came for the day from Dehradun and other places. This year the rain was not felt to be a disturbance since Mataji could sit comfortably in the spacious hall and every single person had the chance to approach Ma individually and offer *pranāma* with their gift or doing puja, receiving Ma's blessing and *prasada* from Her hands. Mataji would alternately sit in the hall, then attend Gurupuja in Didima's Samadhi Mandir and also spend some time in the Siva Temple. When She returned to the hall, more devotees had arrived, eager to pay homage to Her. Satsang was held, followed by the customary feast given to all present. On July 28th a special Puja was performed for Nagpanchami day in Ma's presence in Didima's Mandir. At midday there was *Daridra Narāyaṇa Bhojan* (feeding of Lord Narayana in the guise of the poor and destitue). Mataji together with Sri Girdhari Narayan Puri, the Mahant of Nirvani Akhara sat on a wooden couch at the wide open back-gate of the Ashram, while the food was distributed in the lane outside, to the men and women who came in single file and with the food received Mataji's blessing. The girls stood behind Ma's seat, singing kirtan all the while.

On July 29th, Mataji left by car at about 1 p.m. for an undisclosed destination with only a handful of people. She was to leave between 9 and 10 a.m. but for various reasons Her departure was delayed until after 1 p.m. to the delight of everyone present, since Mataji remained downstairs for over three hours and one could have Her *darśana* most of the time. Amongst the few present there were quite a number of foreigners. Several had come for Gurupurnima and a few more had arrived from France a couple of days after the festival.

When Mataji came to Dehradun on August 9th, She related that She had spent the ten days in between in Suktal, a holy place near Muzaffarnagar, in the Ashram of Sri Swami Vishnuashram, where She was able to have a good rest, free from crowds. Consequently Mataji's state of health seemed visibly improved. Suktal was quite hot and Ma would remain in Her room all day long, attending to correspondence and other work for which She gets no leisure when there is one function after another. In the cool of the evening She would spend about three hours in the open air, in quiet and solitude, with only just half a dozen of people enjoying Her *darśana*.

As soon as Mataji had arrived at Kankhal in July, a devotee came from Dehradun who was very anxious to arrange for an "*Akhaṇḍa Ramayaṇa*" in Mataji's presence in the Kishenpur Ashram. She requested Mataji to fix Herself the date that would suit Her best. Only from Suktal Mataji sent word that She would reach Kishenpur on August 9th, and that the recitation of the Ramayana should be started that morning. Mataji alighted at about 5 p.m. and went straight to the hall where she gave *darśana* for about 45 minutes. Upstairs also She talked to small groups. Mataji had come to Dehradun after a long interval and was leaving for Kankhal the next afternoon. So many devotees had been waiting for an opportunity to talk to Her. Mataji, therefore, gave innumerable "privates" till quite late. On the 10th morning after the completion of the Ramayana in Mataji's presence, everybody was served prasāda in batches as it was pouring with rain and the platform in the open could not be used. At about 1–30 p.m. Mataji got into the car and drove to Kankhal. On the way She halted at Baghat House, Hardwar for a short while.

On the 11th morning another *Nāg Pujā* was celebrated in the outer room of the Samādhi Mandir. At midday the grandson of Mataji's only brother had his first feeding of solid food (*Annaprāśana* ceremony) in Mataji's presence. The whole family had come from Delhi for the occasion.

On August 13th, the 5th anniversary of Didima's *Mahāsamādhi* was celebrated. It started at 4 a.m. with Nagar Kirtan round the Ashram area in spite of the rain. Kirtan was then kept up in the Ashram while Didima's son, Sri Makhan Bhattacharya, performed an elaborate pujā in the Samādhi Mandir. Satsang was held in the hall from about 10 a.m., when Dr. Gourinath Shastri, Mahamandaleshwara Sri Prakashananda of Kankhal and Sri Swami Madhavananda of Sivananda Ashram delivered short talks in Mataji presence. This was followed by a feast given to a large number of Sannyāsis upstairs and to all present downstairs, At about 1 p.m., the time when Didima had left Her body, this was commemorated by half an hour's silent meditation in front of the Samādhi Mandir. Only Ashramites and a few guests staying in the Ashram buildings or near about attended. Mataji remained upstairs on Her veranda which is almost adjoining.

On the 14th morning a *Bhagavata Saptah* started. On the 9th evening at Kishenpur, the widow of Sri Omprakash Madhoram had come to request Mataji to fix the date and place for a Bhagavata Saptaha for her deceased husband. When Mataji has the *kheyāla*, things can be arranged at very short notice with amazing swiftness and everything dovetails. That very evening a messenger was sent to Vrindaban in search of pandits who could officiate in the Bhagavata Saptah and do the Sanskrit recitation as well as the Hindi discourses. The members of the Madhoram family who reside in Delhi were summoned by trunk call. Lo and behold—everything was accomplished within three days. On the 13th everyone arrived and the necessary preparations were complete.

Purānāchārya Sri Brij Mohan Shastri of Vrindaban proved an excellent speaker who kept his audience spell-bound every afternoon for three hours and at times moved them to tears, notwithstanding the fact that he was suffering from cold and fever for several days. This was the first time that he expounded the Bhagavata in our Ashram. Before leaving Kankhal he confided to Mataji that it had since long been his desire to be able to do so in Her presence. At last his wish had been fulfilled and he felt greatly blessed. Mataji attended his talks daily for some time towards the end and for a longer time on the day on which Sri Krishna's birthday was narrated and hailed and sweets were distributed to all present.

The lectures on the Bhagavata were held on the large veranda of the so-called guest house with very effective loud-speakers, while the Sanskrit reading was done in one of the rooms. In the meanwhile the hall was being decorated and got ready for the Jhulan festival which started on August 17th, *Ekadasi* day.* That day being *Sankranti*, the whole of the Ramayana was also recited in another portion of the very spacious hall, with *Purnāhuti* (completion) on the 18th morning in Mataji's presence.

A large swing had been suspended in the middle of the long side of the hall and was decorated differently every night with colourful hangings, leaves and flowers and on the last day with lots of fruits suspended on branches full of green foliage that had been fastened to the ropes that held the swing. Several pictures of Sri Krishna were placed on the swing and the first night only a tiny little statue of Gopal occupied the centre. Every evening *Puja* & *ārati* to the accompaniment of songs started at 7-30 p.m. At the end of the worship, Mataji was always the first to pull the rope of the swing and after Her many had their turn. The first evening Mataji Herself sat on the swing for a short while. She also led the kirtan for some time, singing a swing song. The next evening a very beautiful larger *vigraha* of Radha-Krishna that had arrived with an ashramite from Dehradun, could be seen in the centre. By and by more images came and the decorations also became ever more gorgeous until the climax on Jhulan Purnima, August 21st. The number of visitors increased daily both during the Bhagavata & Jhulan, Sri Mahantji was also present for the swing festival once or twice and another day Sri Mahamandaleswara attended. On Jhulan Purnima, midnight meditation was observed solemnly asevery year in Mataji's presence, preceded and followed by *bhajans* (religious songs). That day was also *Rakshabandhan* and everyone tied a *rakhi* round Mataji's wrist and She usually gave one in return, but this year She did not tie them with Her own hands, as She had done in former years.

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* *Ekadasi* The eleventh day of each phase of the moon.

Mataji was to leave Kankhal soon after this festival but to the great joy of all present, Sri Mahantaji Girdhari Narayana persuaded Her to remain over *Janmastami* (Sri Krishna's birthday) which fell on August 29th. Even in the interval of seven days Mataji did not leave the Ashram premises. She merely shifted to a room on the upper storey of the guest-house for a few days and gave *darśana* on the veranda in front of Her room there. One day two men from the Delhi Radio Station came with a tape recorder and asked Mataji to give a message. Mataji talked to them for some time but for taping She only said Her usual : "*Hari katha hi kotha our sab vritha, vyatha*" and "*Jahān Rām vahān arām, jahān Rām nahin vahan vyāram.*"*

As a part of the Janmastami celebrations, scenes from Sri Krishna's early life were represented in one portion of the hall with little cardboard houses, clay dolls and trees, etc. Some devotees had worked indefatigably for several days and it all was very charming to look at. There was the prison in which Sri Krishna was born, Gokul, Vrindaban, Kalia, Putna, Mount Govardhan, etc. etc. all lit up brightly with tiny electric bulbs.

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* "Talk must be of Him alone, all the rest is futile and painful." "Where Ram is, there is rest and ease, where Ram is not there is discomfort and uneasiness."

In the early evening Mataji came to the hall for a short time and inspected the preparations for the midnight Puja. Then She went to Nirvani Akhara for a little while to see the decorations there. At 10 p.m. kirtan started. Soon after, Ma came and sat alternately in the two places that had been prepared for Her so that everyone could see Her from near for some time. A number of devotees did pujā and put brightly coloured saris of various hues round Her, crowns on Her head and some also a flute into Her hands. Then an elaborate pujā of Sri Krishna was performed while kirtan was sung. Round midnight, Brahmachari Bhaskarananda read out in Sanskrit the description of Sri Krishna's birth from the Bhagavata. This was followed by more music. At the end Mataji distributed prasada with full hands. Only at about 3–30 a.m. She lay down to rest.

On the 30th morning, *Nandotsava* (the joy of the cowherds over the birth of Sri Krishṇa) was celebrated in the courtyard of the guest-house. A circular altar was improvised in the centre, with a small clay shrine on pillars on the top, in which a tiny image of Devaki holding Baby Gopal in her arms could be seen. Some devotees, dressed up as *gopas* (cowherds), started dancing round the altar, singing merrily to the accompaniment of cymbals and drums. Gradually other men, young and old, joined them. Standing shyly in a corner, there were four *gopis* (milk-maids) with earthen vessels on their heads that were half filled with curds. The gopis were dressed up very colourfully and wore long *dense* veils over their faces. It was impossible to make out their identity. Gradually Mataji appeared and joined the fun. She took the *gopis* and all other women present, who formed a larger outer circle, to circumambulate round the altar singing in unison with the men with ever-increasing enthusiasm. Mataji caught hold of each gopi by turns and swung round for a second. The chief gopa (a devotee from Delhi who is present every year for this occasion) carried on his shoulders a yoke with two earthen pots full of curds mixed with saffron. In obedience to tradition he stumbled and fell down, the vessels smashed to pieces with the yellow curds splashing all over. This marked the end of the dance and the climax of the festival. Everyone's forehead was marked with those curds. Then Mataji snatched one vessel after another from the *gopis'* heads and threw curds into the mouths and all over the faces of the throng that formed round Her. Sri Mahantji and a few other sādhus had come and been offered seats on the veranda from where they watched with obvious enjoyment. Mataji went and administered a share of curds to them also. Everyone was in high spirits. A number of devotees had come specially from Dehradun to be present for the solemn midnight worship and the hilarious festival the next morning. After a feast given to all at midday most visitors dispersed. Mataji remained in Kankhal until September 2nd. One day, foundation stones were laid in Mataji's presence for a small house that two brahmacharis are building for their own use and for a room with accesories upstairs near the hall for two brahmacharinis.

When Mataji left, She said She was going to Delhi for a day and a night and would from there motor to Vrindaban on September 4th. Soon after reaching our Delhi Ashram on the 3rd morning, a trunk-call was received from Poona to say that Sri Gurupriya Didi's health was not at all satisfactory. Mataji sent Her party to Vrindaban and left with only two or three companions for Poona the same evening alighting there by car from Bombay on the 4th night. After a stay of three days, She took Didi with Her, first to Bombay and then to Delhi for treatment, reaching there on the 9th morning. The next morning Mataji drove to Vrindaban.

From September 13th to 20th a Bhagavata Saptaha was held by the Raja and Rani of Achroll. The Sanskrit recitations were done separately by two pandits in the Gita Bhavan of our Ashram, while the Hindi discourses were delivered by Swami Sri Visnuashramji in the hall, every day from 8 to 11 a.m. and from 3 to 6 p.m. Swami Visnuashramji is not only well-known for his wonderful way of talking and explaining; his great wisdom and knowledge are quite outstanding. The first two days Mataji remained present throughout his talks and on the following days listened while lying on Her couch in the corridor (*parikrami*) that goes round Chheliya Mandir. There itself She also slept every night. Towards the end of each discourse Mataji used to come and occupy Her seat near Swami Vishnuashram for some time.

In the evening Mataji would give *darśan* on the roof of Her house and sometimes talk very animatedly to small groups coming from Vrindaban, Mathura and other places to meet Her.

On September 15th, *Ekadasi* day, Sri Lakshmi Narayan one of the Ashram cooks who often travelled with Mataji, passed away in the Ramakrishna Mission hospital opposite our Ashram after a short but serious illness. Mataji had gone to see him in the hospital and attended to him with much concern. His body was brought first to the Ashram and from there taken to the burning-ghat. He had been an enthusiastic Vaisnava and it was, therefore, most auspicious for him to leave his body in Vrindaban, during a Bhagavata Saptah and most of all under Mataji's care and in Her presence. We tend our condolence to his bereaved family. May he rest in the Lord !

The Bhagavata Saptaha ended on full-moon day when Ram-Archa was performed in Ram Bhavan. On September 22nd morning, Mataji proceeded by car to our New Delhi Ashram. The same night She boarded the train to Luknow enroute to Naimisharanya. Only very few were allowed to accompany Ma as She needed a rest very badly.

Durga Puja was to be held at Uttarkashi this year, although Mataji actually had no *kheyāla* to go there. Already while Ma was at Kankhal the hill-road was damaged by heavy rains and closed for traffic at intervals. In September the situation worsened due to incessant rains and storms, and the persons who were to go there and see to all preparations had to turn back half way. There was no alternative but to shift the function to another place. This was the first occasion in the history of the Anandamayee Sangha when the programme had to be altered after the invitations had been sent out. Kashi was chosen instead of Uttarkashi. Mataji reached Varanasi from Naimisharanya early morning on October 4th, the day of *Mahalaya*. Chandipath was to be held during *Navaratri* and the usual daily preliminary worship until *Sasti*, October 10th, when the actual pujā of the images begins. Mataji is expected to be present in Varanasi also for Lakshmi Puja, on fullmoon night, October 19th. Kali Puja is to be celebrated in our Kali Mandir at Uttarkashi in Mataji's presence on November 2nd and *Annakut* on November 4th also there.

The 26th *Samyam Mahavrata* is scheduled to take place from November 10th to 17th at the invitation of the Jaipuria family at Swadeshi House, Civil Lines, Kanpur.

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